

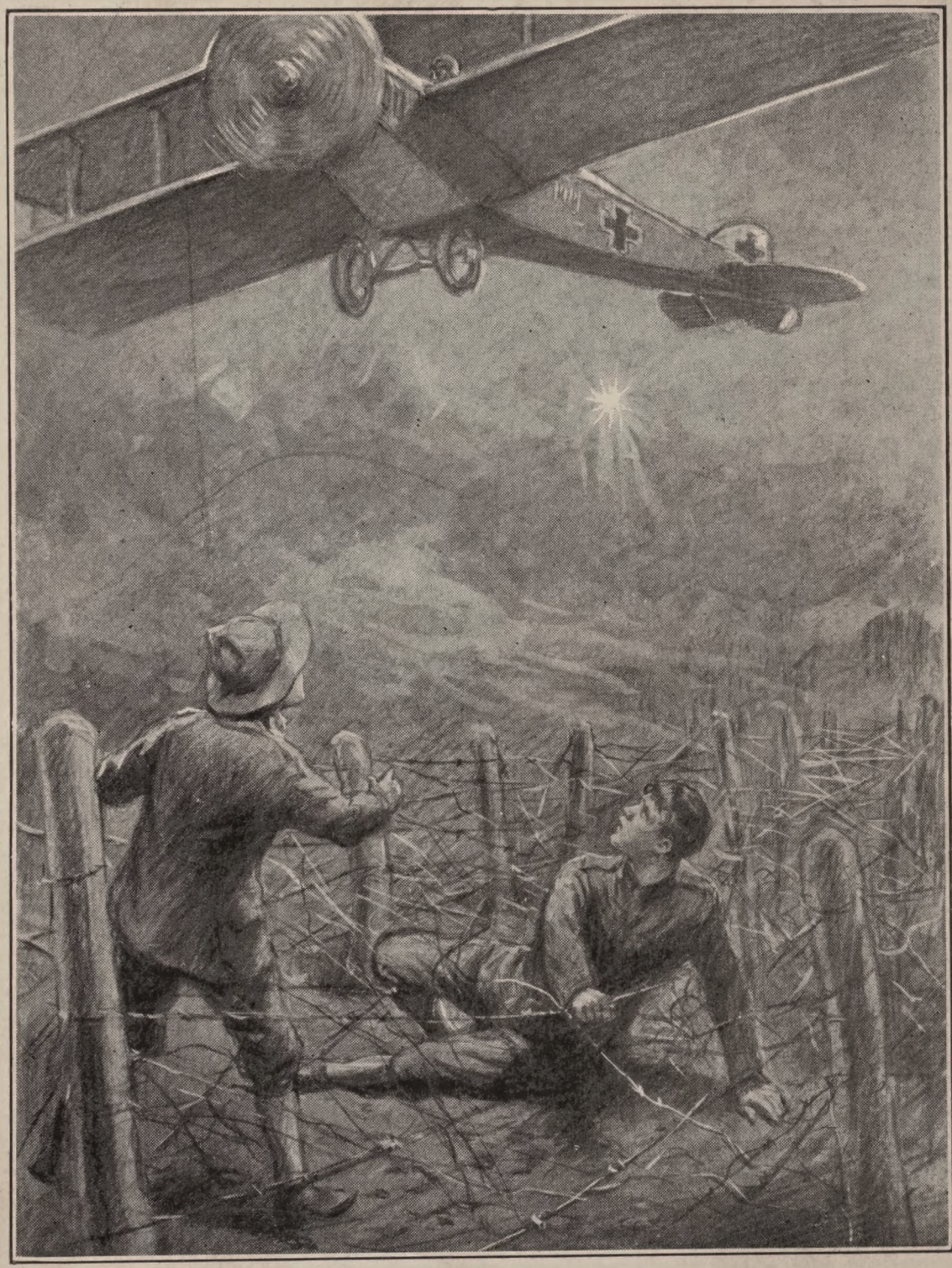
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JIMMY MAY IN THE FIGHTING LINE



Then came an ear-splitting crash above them.

[PAGE 36]

JIMMY MAY *in the* FIGHTING LINE

BY

CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

AUTHOR OF "THE CALL TO THE COLORS," ETC.

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JIMMY MAY IN THE FIGHTING LINE

CHAPTER I

HIS FIRST BIG ONE

THE big, gray touring car stopped in the dust of a white road on the chalky hills of the Champagne, and the bearded young French captain got out. After him came the regimental adjutant, and Corporal Jimmy May's senior company commander, and then Lieutenant Miller of Jimmy's own platoon.

"And now, Americans," laughed the young Frenchman in excellent English, "at the top of this hill I will introduce you to the world war! Come!"

The group started up the green slope along a line of poplars which hardly yet had recovered from the devastation, wrought when the gray hordes of the Huns swept down on France, only

to be driven back from the Marne in the days of September, 1914, that seemed now so long ago.

Corporal Jimmy May sat with the chauffeur in the front seat of the big car and looked longingly up at his regimental officers. It was the week after the landing of the first contingent of the American Expeditionary force, and he had been taken along as orderly with these few officers who had begun to be sent on up to the front for a preliminary glimpse of the battle before they had to settle down to the long months of training their troops.

"Say," grumbled Jimmy, "I wish they'd have taken me up that hill! It's tough to be probably the first infantry private in all General Pershing's army who's been able to get right up to the front as yet, and then not see it! Me—first doughboy in all the bunch—and they let me stick here in this motor car!"

He looked glumly at the driver who didn't know any English.

"Oui! Mais non—" put in the driver apologetically.

"Oh, cut it!" said Jimmy, "I've been under

fire before—plenty of it in Mexico; and I've seen a bit of rough work besides! I don't believe Lieutenant Miller intended to leave me behind —yet they didn't tell me to come on. But they didn't tell me to *stay!*"

He watched the group of officers—olive drab, tall Americans, and sturdy bearded Frenchmen in horizon blue, now far up the hill to the north, and then he threw a legging discontentedly over the side of the car. Corporal May had a strict sense of discipline—but wouldn't it be a bully thing to say he was the first private of the infantry line who'd seen the German foe?

Then Jimmy yelled with sudden delight. In the seat of the tonneau he spied his lieutenant's field glasses! The officers had been chaffing about one another's binoculars all the way up from the brigade billets where B Company was in camp.

"Sure he'll want 'em!" whooped Corporal Jimmy, "and I'm the lucky bucky right on the spot to gallop there with 'em!"

Over he went, the field glasses in hand, and dashed away up the poplar row. He had lost sight of the officers now, and when he got to the

top of the first ridge he looked expectantly this way and that. Then he went down across a cabbage field where the round heads were already growing among the grass green shell-holes of the campaigns of last year and before, up the next slope and into a small wood. Still he didn't see his superiors.

"Must be on that next slope," muttered Jimmy, "all right, I can go far as they can!"

But he was surprised to look out on a smiling, green and wooded country rolling northwestward, and with no signs of war unless one looked closely here or there, in the immediate foreground, for old shell-holes or riven trees. No trace of the French lines even was visible, though Jimmy's party had passed many lines of transport,—*camions,* light field batteries, ambulances and companies of *poilus* on the main traveled roads from the billet villages where the Americans were. But in reaching this ridge of the Champagne they had come up a very rough stretch, so Jimmy concluded that the transport lines did not pass here. Standing in the little wood, the slope breaking at his feet down to the gentler lands, he took Lieutenant Miller's field

glasses and searched the innocent-looking country northward.

In the hazy distance he picked up dark lines converging to the left. Presently he thought he saw irregular markings, too, at right angles to these. Then he looked to his left and right along the broken ridges; still no officer party in sight.

"This war," mused Jimmy, "looks peaceful as nothing! If Perky and Tolliver, and my old bunkies of the Mexican border days were up here, they'd just naturally curl up in this grass and take a snooze. It isn't as exciting as chasing down spy plots back home on the Intelligence detail, or dodging the U-boats on our pleasing run over to this little old Europe! Hi—what's that?"

For he heard a distant reverberation somewhere northward. Then another shortly—a low, choky cough, and after awhile it seemed like muffled thunder. If Corporal May, waiting intently for his first gun of Armageddon, had closed his eyes to this peaceful, sunny spot in France, he would have sleepily sworn it was a summer storm arising lazily.

"But—first gun!" muttered Corporal May, "fine,—I got that much ahead of the bunch back there drilling away at the bomb and bayonet stuff anyhow! But Lieutenant Miller—I'll get a call-down if I don't find those officers soon and hand him these glasses! Or if they go back to the machine and I'm gone wild-goose chasing off without orders, well—it'll be the first demerit for Corporal James Edward May since he joined the colors!"

So Corporal May turned back, as his first sight of the world war was so disappointing. He had just got back among the young trees on his way down to the road where the car waited, when he heard a shout somewhere. It seemed to his left, and turning out of the brush, Jimmy glanced up. He saw the young French captain in the gray-blue; he saw his own company officers and the regimental adjutant. They all suddenly began to shout at him, and then they turned and dashed back to the ridge. Jimmy saw them stop as suddenly; then he was amazed to see them fade away, one by one, apparently into the ground.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Jimmy, "where

did they go to—and where'd they come from? Oh . . . a hole in the ground—sure!"

But he didn't know what the matter was. Only, the last man to disappear so mysteriously into the soil of France was that lusty bearded young French captain himself, and he went down still yelling at Corporal May, but so far away that Corporal Jimmy could not tell what it was about. But the French officer waved and pointed as he disappeared.

Jimmy looked up, and around. He seemed to hear some strange, far moaning in the sky; not at all like the joyous bark of the American field guns that he had heard once or twice when he was chasing Villa in Mexico. But he knew what it was all right.

"Hi, a shell somewhere!" he said to himself interestedly, "and it's for me up the ridge to see this first boy! Chased the officer chaps to shelter all right, but I don't just see any hole that's handy for me!"

So he dodged back the way he had come intending to go out through the woods and give that smiling, peaceful enemy country ahead another "once-over." That whining song in the air was

stronger, and seemed to be passing over; and then suddenly a new note blotted this out—something that grew with the roar of an express train dashing over a culvert; and then there came the most tremendous racket that young Corporal May had ever heard in his life. He went flat on the ground as if something had bumped him from head to foot—which something had.

After a moment he looked up through the young poplars to see a dun, dusty, smoky cloud as big as a city block spreading up and out. It was just over where his officers had dodged into a hole like rabbits, apparently, and Jimmy got up, dusted his clothes and stared incredulously. Gradually he made out the smoking lines of another hole—a bigger one than he had dreamed a shell could make. It just hurt his pride to think that he, a two-years' service man, could be so completely surprised and rattled by anything. He walked on slowly towards this mass of reddish earth which continued to give off spirals of smoke; and presently he saw forms on the other side—his beloved company officers and their French guide, hurrying down the other slope towards the road.

When they saw him they halted for a second, shouted at him and went on. Jimmy May started to run around that shell crater, and joined them a hundred yards below it. Blithely, to show how unconcerned he was, he began swinging Lieutenant Miller's field glasses as he came to them.

"Here, sir! You left them in the car, sir, and I——"

"Oh! That's why you left the car, Corporal, without orders?"

"I—suppose so, sir! And to tell the truth, I wanted to be the first private soldier, if possible, who saw the front lines!"

"Yes, sir—very good, sir!" Lieutenant Miller retorted, "only our French friend here says that the Germans have a habit of poking a duet of twelve-inch shells onto this ridge daily just probably to discourage its use as an observation point back of our line."

"Yes, sir."

"And you wanted to be the first man in the Army to see anything, eh? You came mighty near being the first man the Army would have to cable home about as among those missing—

for you'd have been merely missing, Corporal May, if you'd kept on strolling."

"Yes, sir," grinned Jimmy, "but I'm glad—it was a good way to be introduced, sir—I think!"

CHAPTER II

NOT IN THE I. D. R.

IN a dark, little room of a low-ceilinged stone house, one of a long row straggling along a crooked, cobbled street of a village in France which must be unnamed until Uncle Sam is through with Mr. Bill Hohenzollern, a sun-bronzed, lean-bodied, young corporal of the Regulars sat at a table trying to write out a guard roster which he had unwisely volunteered to do to assist his overly busy top sergeant to-day.

Corporal Jimmy May scrawled a bit and then felt of sundry long, unhealed scratches on his hands, on both hands. Then he felt of some other gashes on his elbows. He reached down and felt of one on his stiff left leg.

"Ouch!" he murmured. "Maybe it can't be done as those two wise old birds bluffed, but I think it can. I'm going to sneak out after retreat when it's kind of dusk and practice once.

Then I'll entice Perky and Tolliver into raggin' me again before the wire detail, next time we're out there; and then, me, I'll walk out in front of 'em, chipper as a lark, grab the vaulting pole and show 'em how a track man could hop over a whole wire entanglement of the Boches. Not—" he murmured again, dubiously, "that it's of any practical military use, but just to show those croakers."

Just then a shadow darkened the single door of the orderly room. Jimmy looked up with some irritation. The company clerk was sick and in hospital. The top sergeant had been worried by the company officers, who, in turn, had been worried by the battalion command, as to certain new details and sections which had to be arranged for certain novel methods of trench attack—all theory and training as yet. For though B Company had been quartered these many weeks back of the lines where they could, at times, hear the distant reverberations of the mighty guns, so far they had not fired a shot or had a glimpse of an enemy. So Sergeant Milbank, with his fellow sergeants, had been bothered fair in picking and choosing men for the

specialized and final training ere the battalion went forward to get its baptism of fire along with the rest of Pershing's picked front-line troops. Not only every platoon, but every squad was selected and tested as to individuals—rifle grenadiers, light machine gunners, hand bomb throwers and bayonet men—and it was largely up to the noncoms as to who was best for any particular bit of training.

So, as Corporal May was too stiff and cut up from these mysterious scratches to be out training his own "mopping up" squad, he had been asked to get out some of the routine clerical work. Not another soul was about the orderly room, and few in the quarters, which quarters were a strange assortment—stone houses of the French peasants along this quaint little deserted street, barns and outbuildings, any place that could hive the hard-working Sammies while at their intensive grind.

"Hello, there!" bawled Jimmy, for he thought it was some one of the decrepit old Frenchies who policed around the quarters while the companies were out at drill, "François! No dustin' in here

now! Go away! *Parlez-vous* vamoose? Nix. Meaning: beat it!"

"Say," was the eager response, "I think I know your voice! Must be B Company, all right—and Corporal Jimmy!"

Corporal May sprang erect and stared. He knew that voice too!

Slowly he advanced to the figure in the doorway, a smallish figure garbed in a horizon-blue, ragged coat and a battered American campaign hat, both away too large altogether, as were the canvas leggings on the feet of this nondescript and international soldier of misfortune. Corporal Jimmy, ever the neat and trim olive-garbed infantryman, to whom any military disarray was an abomination, looked the newcomer over again, and again he gasped:

"Hi, there, kid! And what are you doing in France?"

He reached to grasp a grimy paw which the boy thrust out from under his poilu's discarded tunic. Jimmy stared again.

"Warty, it isn't possible! Didn't I see you last hanging around the fence outside the transport docks in New Orleans?"

"Sure you did! You remember I told you I'd make it! Couldn't get on your ship though, or you'd have heard of me before this, Corporal." Warty grinned, much satisfied with himself. "I made up my mind that this Army couldn't shake me—or B Company, either, but I did have a time of it. They took me on the old *Momus* finally as mess boy, and I worked over all right. But, gee, getting up here was a job!"

"Well, if you did it without any authority, you're a wonder, and what's more they'll ship you right back to the disembarking port. And lucky if they don't clap you in jail on top of it!"

Warty laughed. "Not if my luck sticks! I was knocking around with these transport fellows when I ran onto that quartermaster captain that you introduced me to the time we had the scrap with the dynamite spies on the Mississippi levee—remember? Well, this captain certainly treated me fine. Of course he laughed when I told him I wanted to enlist in your bunch. And I reckon I'd have had to go back on the transport with the mess boys again, only she

broke down, and had to be docked. That was my piece of luck. I hooked onto this quartermaster captain who was so mighty busy that he had to use me in his clothing depot. Worked there six weeks, Corporal, scheming all the time how to get up to the lines. Then Captain Frazier sent some of us off on a mule convoy to a little burg somewhere back here, and there I hooked up with a newspaper correspondent who gave me a lift in his car here, when I happened to mention your company officers."

"Deserted your transport and quartermaster's job, did you? They'll fix you, Warty, for this."

"They got no hold on me. I wasn't even a civilian employee, regular. Just a volunteer, and no pay either—yet!" Warty grinned cheerfully. "What's more, they can keep the pay if I can stick up here near the fightin' chaps."

"Fine chance!" Corporal Jimmy looked over Warty's comedy clothes, picked up only he knew where. "The Intelligence Office will send you back, unless, perhaps——"

"Say it," cried Warty, "unless *you* fix it up!"

"Don't know as I want to. What business has a kid like you up here where it's all work, and

after that into the trenches for us? I suppose if I told 'em that you were the kid that kept the dynamiters from blowing out the Mississippi levee, and helped the Regulars to run down the wireless spies, and on top of that were clever enough to beat your way overseas and clean up to the front line, why, I suppose maybe you might interest 'em." Corporal Jimmy stared sternly at Warty. "Mind you—it wouldn't save you from being chucked back. But as long as you're here—take off that idiotic coat of yours, and make a bluff at doing something. If you could run a typewriter——"

"Sure, I can run a typewriter."

Jimmy was feeling of his stiff fingers. "You little river rat, where did you ever run a typewriter?"

"Not much. Used to bat away on the purser's on an Ohio packet, just for fun. Same thing in France, ain't it, Corporal?"

"You make three copies of these rosters—and make out forms for these requisitions, like these, see? My fingers are all cut up!"

"What's the matter with 'em?"

"Never mind, son. You sit down and make

a noise like you were useful. When the officers see you in this orderly room they'll make an awful roar. Our company clerk is laid out, and the top sergeant is over his ears in work. So, if you kick in and help out, maybe B Company could board you a few days—until headquarters hears of you and chases you back to your ship."

Warty looked over his job, rolled up his big sleeves and grumbled away as he worked.

"I could have done this over in that little old U.S.A.," he said. "Say, is that a gun whoopin' away off there?"

"It is. A Boche howitzer, forty-two centimeters, maybe. Recollect, please, that they could throw a shell fourteen miles right down on this orderly room, if they felt that way—and hustle with that roster."

"Gee!" murmured Warty, and his eyes stuck out with fearful joy.

Corporal May limped out and sat down on a stone bench. Down the deserted, sunny street he could see a platoon of his battalion going through their everlasting bayonet fencing with the instructor who tapped them smartly from behind with his ringed pole so that they must turn,

charge and transfix the rings—high, low thrust, right and left parry, jab and butt strokes. And further out other squads were attacking the dummies, in line and down in the trenches, ripping them up as they leaped, and charging on for the next defenders. Not a lean, brown man of the lot who was not, by now, in the keenest physical condition, alert with the months of training and eager to be put to the test these lusty October days. Already there were rumors flying up and down the line of billeted villages that the American artillerymen were at it with the French 75's.

"What's the matter with us?" growled the Infantry. "Fit as fiddles, and hard as nails—that's how we are! Why don't they send us in?"

Officers and some picked noncoms had already been in—to the French front-line trenches in this quiet sector, but that was not what the B Company doughboys and the rest of them meant at all. They wanted to go in, and stick in, holding their own line and worming forward in some big drive on the Germans. That was why they "ate up" their work so ravenously, just as they did the hearty, base camp grub to which Jimmy

now watched them coming, swinging along in squad column with the day's grind half done.

When the ranks had been dismissed in the street and the hungry mob had scattered for barracks to divest themselves of rifles and field kits, Jimmy saluted his ranking company officer.

"A new clerk, sir, seems to have arrived. Headquarters doesn't know anything about it either, but perhaps I could explain. Do you remember, sir, back home—when the regiment was at Jackson Barracks, the boy that I brought in? Special duty, sir, with the Intelligence Department, and I called attention to this youngster's part in running down the wireless plotters?"

"Oh—Warts?" murmured Lieutenant Miller; "but what the mischief——"

Corporal May explained simply. "I think Captain Wilson of the Q.M.C. would vouch for him, sir. Had him employed down there anyhow."

"Keep him busy, then, 'til we see," retorted the hurrying drill officer. "And you, Corporal—able to go out again on the wires?"

"Yes, sir. They patched me up all over, sir. I'm ready!"

And the worried company commander laughed.

The whole company had laughed. When Jimmy limped down to his squad's barracks, Privates Perkins and Tolliver, especially, laughed. Jimmy saw them now out of the corner of his eye. Of all his squad of eight men, Perky and Tolliver were the only members from the old Mexican Border days. Like Jimmy himself—and Jimmy was only twenty this year—they felt like veterans along with the six-months' drilled rookies who had been mauled into shape behind the lines all this summer. So Perky and Tolliver, because they had soldiered along with Corporal Jimmy in Sonora and had mingled their beans and bully beef with his on many an outpost, could take liberties with a beloved N.C.O.

They began it once more, innocently, when Corporal May slid a sore leg in over the bench at mess. Private Perkins reached for the tea past the Corporal's ear, but he looked at Tolliver.

"Tell me, bucky," began he, "what is the record in this highfalutin' high vault of which col-

lege men is so proud? How far could a lad jump now?"

"I don't know," murmured Tolliver, "but I know this, Perky: No matter how high he jumped, he'd have to come down. That's what hurted 'em—this comin' down business on a bunch of barbed wire the same which was put up to keep Fritzies out and not for college men to jump over."

And the six-months' rookies of Squad Twelve laughed guardedly. They had all seen it. Three of them had helped cut, unbutton, dig and lift their corporal out of the mess. Just now their corporal was reaching serenely for the beef stew. He couldn't deny it. The whole platoon, in one of the rest periods, while drilling over the wire defenses, had heard the argument which Perkins had started. He had opined that what Pershing's expeditionary force needed right in front was a line of college high jumpers and pole vaulters, so that instead of laboriously pounding up the Boche entanglements with artillery and then sending wire cutters on to clear the way for the charging troops, these star letter men would be over the top in two jumps. He knew that

Jimmy May had once been a prep school vaulter; and perhaps that was why, after airing all he didn't know of track athletics, Private Perkins winked at Private Tolliver and declared of course such talk was foolish, because no "college man" could jump the four line "apron and festoon" defense which the wire detail had just completed.

"Might be done all right," Corporal Jimmy had put in casually. "But what for? The Fritzies would drill 'em full of holes in mid-air!"

"No, they wouldn't. The Fritzies would be so surprised at a lot of college jumping jacks sailing up over the wires that they'd forget all about shooting. But you couldn't do it, Corporal—and besides, it ain't in the Infantry Drill Regulations."

"We're doing a barrel of tricks every day," retorted Jimmy, "that aren't in the I.D.R. When it comes to getting through the wires you can jump, cut, crawl, hurdle—any old way, long as you do it quick and find cover the other side until the slow ones get to the line."

"It would be a sight, now wouldn't it, Perky?" mused Tolliver. "Only it can't be done. A college man couldn't clear that mess of wires. I

guess we'll stick to the I.D.R. and the new French stuff."

"Jump 'em?" retorted Jimmy, interested at last. "If I got the right take-off and gave a shove at the right instant, I could drop clean over. It's less than eighteen feet broad and not four high. Of course it's not pole vaulting—it would be jumping with a pole like I've seen the kids do."

"Kids could, all right," muttered Perkins, complacently, "but these here college men couldn't—it 'ud be too original for 'em. Also too high, and too broad. They'd have to have yell leaders and referees——"

"Say," broke in Jimmy, "I'll bet you a dish of exchange ice cream I can hop that wire stuff the first try. That's no hard trick. Trying to crawl through is what gets you. I don't mean with your kit, of course, and gun and all. If I did, there'd be nothing to it but organize some classy first-line pole jumpers and take the wire defenses on a run!"

"What you mean," said Perky, "is that you can jump 'em—honest?"

"Any fool could do it," retorted Jimmy, unguardedly.

"Well, you didn't, Corporal. You landed on your back in the third festoon and, I blush to relate, you was stuck."

"I had a field pack and a pole that was no good. Never mind there, bullies. Fall to that slum and fill up. You're going to get double drill this afternoon. Next week, maybe, you'll have something more than sticking straw dummies, too!"

And the mess snickered a bit and mumbled over their chuck.

The Corporal seemed sort of "het up." He couldn't endure being laughed at; and besides, the officers and the French instructors also had seen this ridiculous affair and had laughed. Worse than that, Lieutenant Miller had "bawled him out," the first time in Jimmy's whole Army life. He went through the afternoon drill and trench instructions with a subdued and curt air, which boded no good for any laggard in his squad. After recall he looked in the orderly room, remembering then that he had totally forgotten Warty Wallace, the stowaway and

hanger-on who had actually done the impossible and followed the Army to France.

"Hi, kid!" he yelled, "did the officers scalp you?"

"They did. They was rough, Corporal. But they don't know what to do with me, for they can't let me loose to run around, you see. So they gave me a whole pile of company business to copy, and when the top sergeant got through abusin' me, he seemed glad to watch me work. I guess he knows more about bawlin' out rookies than he does typewritin', doesn't he?"

"They'll turn you over to regimental headquarters soon as they get the work out of you. When I'm off after retreat, you come down past the little bridge and I'll wise you up to some things that'll help you to stick on and maybe keep out of the guardhouse."

"Thanks," said Warty, "and say—is that a German gun boomin' away off somewhere? Gee whiz!—think o' *me* gettin' to hear 'em!"

Corporal May strode on to his barracks. Down the long stone street the fellows were idling, cleaning rifles, singing and indulging in their usual horseplay bred of high, animal spir-

its, good food and the wonderful building up of body and nerve that the intensive drive of the Army game was giving them. It would be another game soon, reflected Jimmy; cold and wet and dark and danger. The scattered billets up and down the sector to be assigned the Sammies were already gossiping of the "Big Day," when they would go in among their eager French compatriots and relieve the heroes of the Marne.

At the end of the street Corporal Jimmy came on Private Perkins indulging himself in an unofficial foot inspection. "Ain't so fat as you were in Mexico," commented Jimmy tartly. "Honest, you can count your toes now, can't you, Perky?"

"Yes, just discovered a funny thing. Got the same number of toes on one foot that I have on the other. That's because I never got none tore off tryin' to jump a barbed wire entanglement."

"Good-night," murmured Jimmy; "you got a lot to learn yet."

He went on down to the little stone bridge and leaning on it looked off to the dusk over the silent hills. The marks of the battles that followed the great German retreat had already

faded from this region. The slopes were green and brown and even a row of war-torn poplars along the ridge were struggling back to life. In the gentle rise of land between were the training trenches reconstructed and used for the training of the Sammies these many months; and over that ridge ten miles or more away was the fighting line which the poilus held against the enemy beyond the Aisne.

Sitting on the bridge, swinging his feet down to the pebbles, Jimmy awaited Warty Wallace, who heaved a sigh of relief as he approached.

"Anyhow, they can shoot me to-morrow, but to-day I had a square eat, Corporal Jimmy. Say, you *can* hear the guns from this place, can't you?"

"Been rattling away some time now. Still, they call it quiet up front. I had one look-in close up. Whole country up there is scratched to cinders."

"I sure want to see it."

"Ain't a chance. They'll keep you right here at the base camp, even if they don't send you back to port."

"But first, I want to hear one big whooper go

off right close up. Did you ever see a Boche war plane, Corporal Jimmy?"

"Sure. They drove in over this line a couple of weeks ago and dropped bombs near the artillery depot. Took four bombs to kill one Missouri mule, Warty."

"Sure. I'm from Hannibal, Missouri, myself, Corporal. I'm surprised that it didn't take ten bombs per mule, because we have tough mules back home. Regular old Maudes, they are, and if one of these German aviators ever flew low enough a Missouri mule would kick him clean back to Berlin."

Jimmy laughed. His grouch was lightening under Warty's chaff. He had great reason to love the lad, for Warty had helped him turn two good tricks back home. He jumped up and knocked the dust off his leggings.

"Come on, Warty. Let's stroll over to the training field. I want you to see something. Bring that pole I chucked under the bridge. I hid it there on purpose."

"Pole?" Warty dragged out a long and rather heavy stick which Jimmy took and

"hefted" doubtfully. Then he swung on up the road.

They reached and dodged the first communication trench running into the yellow clay under cover of the creek brush. Then they came to another, the reserve trench, marked by lines of sandbag parapets which gave away to other zigzag trenches leading on up to the rest trenches and the shelters, and from these there were other deep and narrow pits winding up past jutting traverses and pockets to the first-line works where were the loopholed and concealed firing stations for the Infantry squads. Jimmy led the way on past these deserted spots to the gray blur of wire that marked the outer line of the defenses. When they reached the wires, Warty looked back and gasped.

Of all the elaborate system capable of sheltering in this one little sector an entire defending battalion of twelve hundred men, hardly a sign was visible. Here and there the sandbags just protruded, and that was all. Across the creek a mile away the little village, where the regiment was billeted, showed through the autumn orchards. Quiet reigned supreme. Even the

faint artillery fire was just a murmur against the night wind.

Corporal Jimmy laid his pole against the first wires and looked at his friend grimly. "Kid, I'm going in training. I'm going to pull off something for that gang—just once, casual-like, as if it was all in the day's jog with me. Going to do it to-morrow in a resting period, and then go back and sit down and say nothing. And they won't say anything. They'll just know I did it, that's all."

"What's that?" queried Warty, puzzled.

"Going to take a little running hop with this pole and swing over these wires."

"Bust your neck, that's what you'll do. And —listen!"

"Oh, they're always banging away up there! When the wind's right you hear it plainer, sometimes, than you do others. That's why they train us closer and closer to the front—so all these German funny noises don't bother us when the big smash comes."

"But this was different. Sounded like a——"

"You go stand at the end of the first section —front a little, so you can tell me how much I

clear the fourth post line. I want to be sure there's no bobble when I show 'em to-morrow."

Warty obeyed. The wire entanglements were built in fifty-foot sections with a passage between, a crooked passage not visible to the enemy, and supposed to be covered neatly by the defenders' machine guns in case of attack, but leaving a gate in case of an advance by one's own shock troops. Warty went through this opening and looked down the maze of tangled wires.

It was what is called a four line "apron and festoon" fence. Four lines of parallel posts sticking out of the ground some four feet were first driven, and then, to these post rows, four barbed wires were loosely strung. Then diagonal wires from the top of one post to the bottom of another were put on. Then the "apron wires" were laid from one post line to another, zigzagging loosely across, for a tight wire is easily snipped by a wire cutter. Then in the nest of crossing wires, formed by the aprons between the post rows, the curly "festoons" were flung—all loosely and without order as they reeled off the wire spools; and if a soldier jumped the first

line he landed in a tangle out of which he must jump or straddle to another, and after that another; and if he cut the first wires he had to crawl on and dissect the second and third, leaving dozens of barbed and twisting ends to trap and tangle in a fellow's pack and coat and weapons.

"I guess," muttered Warty Wallace, "that even a Missouri mule would have his doubts when he looked this mess over. He'd long for mother, home and the big red apples when he saw this Army fence! Say, Corporal Jimmy! You aren't goin' to try to hurdle this stuff?"

"It isn't in the I.D.R.," retorted Jimmy, "but I'm going to hook over it with this pole, just to show 'em. Watch me, now!"

"Listen," mumbled Warty, "I heard a—something!"

But Corporal May had gone back some paces measuring the pole for a grip, and then looking at a spot for a good take-off to plant his pole just this side of the first post line. It had to be far enough off to give him a good swing as he dropped the pole and projected his body onward to clear the fourth line. He had purposely chosen a point where he got a bit of downhill

rush. Even then he must shove himself some eighteen or twenty feet out or drop in the festoons as he had done on that other humiliating occasion which was yet vivid in the minds of the company.

"Maybe not," he called out, "but I don't mind a jab or two more—long as I don't come down on my face!"

"Listen!" said Warty again, "something's coming!"

But Jimmy May had dashed lightly, swiftly, on over the sod. He jabbed his pole down in the exact spot he had picked out, lifted himself powerfully, climbing hand on hand on his pole as it reached the perpendicular, and then he gave his lithe body a tremendous jerk forward, let go and went like a catapult—right on and down—into the same old maddening tangle of curling wires that he did before!

Warty heard the crash. Then he heard Corporal Jimmy.

"Wow! *Ouch!* Stung again—it beats all, but next time——" He was flat on his back kicking and tearing at the barbed wires. He was stung and gashed on shoulders and elbows, but he was

madder than he was hurt. Only he was thankful that certain individuals of B Company had not been invited to this party. He had plenty of adhesive medicated tape and he could plaster himself up and wait a while.

"Hi, Warty!" He was fighting to get the wire off his shoulder. "Come pry this loose! You keep still about this, too."

"Get out!" Jimmy saw Warty's freckled face staring wildly down at him, then up skyward. "Looky! An airplane!"

Corporal May relaxed and looked up. He didn't see a thing at first, but he heard a snarling hum somewhere. It was over the ridge, and then suddenly he heard the bark of a field gun off to the left, and another, and another. The French anti-aircraft guns from a hilltop suddenly picked up and blazed away at the invaders.

"There's two!" yelled Warty—"three! There's another circling towards camp! I told you I heard 'em buzzin'! There's guns cuttin' loose everywhere!"

"Get me out o' here!" roared Jimmy. "Lemme see!"

He struggled and fought. Warty leaned over

the diagonal wires of the low fence to drag at the tangle of festoons inside. The more he pulled the deeper Jimmy sank and the more taut the holding barbs pulled.

"Wire clippers in my pocket!" gasped Jimmy —"get 'em!" He tried to twist over on his side. Then he did stare. Coming like a rocket down along the ridge and appearing very low, sped a German airplane. Warty Wallace stopped and stared. That machine, with the black crosses on its planes, looked bigger to Warty than any mule in Missouri. The racket of its motor was nerve shattering. And everywhere up the line of hills the French anti-aircraft stations were snarling away at the other planes. They heard an explosion somewhere. But Corporal May ceased his struggles and lay still, staring up.

"Warty, drop on your face—quiet! If that fellow sees any one down here he'll think these trenches are manned and he'll bomb 'em!"

Then came an ear-splitting crash above them. They heard the scream of bullets whirling down, thudding the ground, even singing against the maze of wires.

"Shrapnel!" gasped Jimmy. "They're trying to get this fellow!"

The big war plane had circled in the dusk, out over the hills, and then back towards the village. White puffs broke above and below the German but he sailed grandly on. Once the boys thought he was gone, for the shrapnel puffs hid him completely. Then they saw him against the last red in the sky—but he was coming back like a fox terrier seeking a lost rat trail.

"He's looking for the camp again!" yelled Warty.

"He's coming right over the trenches," yelled Jimmy, "right on over us! Hope they quit shooting at him until——"

Suddenly Warty Wallace leaped over the low wires, landing right down on Corporal May. "Right over us!" he gasped, "and a—bomb!"

Jimmy couldn't see. But he could hear. First the roar of the airplane's motor, and then, drowning that in one terrific burst of sound, an explosion that rocked the earth. The next minute the earth, indeed, seemed to rise up and bury them in a surge of dust and clods and sticks. They felt the wires jerk and strain; and then,

over the noise of falling dirt, the snarl of the war plane's motor as it sped on into the dusk.

"Get off my legs, Warty," moaned Corporal May; "are you hurt?"

"No, I ain't hurt. Only some knobs on me big as eggs where clods hit me. There's half a ton of dirt on us, Jimmy!"

"Get out of here. They've gone now. The guns'll chase 'em. It was you drew that fellow's bomb. He thought there was a nest of us."

Warty crawled painfully up and got the wire cutters from Corporal May's pocket. He clipped and pulled until Jimmy crawled out. There was a hole, big as a house, it looked, right behind the wire defenses.

"Warty," said Jimmy solemnly, "I suppose you jumped over on top of me thinking you'd stop that bomb if it was going to hit me?"

"O-oh—maybe!" said Warty. "It was a good deal like your pole vaultin'—can't be done, but I—tried it."

"Warty," repeated Corporal Jimmy, "you haven't any more sense than one of your Missouri mules!"

"No more than a veteran Regular who won't stick to the I. D. R.," retorted the volunteer.

Corporal Jimmy limped away, jumped the sandbag parapet of the training trenches and met the first of some rather excited soldiers of B Company who had streamed out to the scene of their first encounter with an aerial raider from over the Rhine. They gathered about and stared interestedly into the bomb crater and listened with some disgust to the recital of Warty Wallace's participation in it. They didn't take much to this idea of having a civilian clerk, and camp follower at that, get into the limelight with the popular corporal.

Corporal May's officers listened, some with grins and some with military disapproval. They shook their heads over Warty.

"How old is this young protégé of yours, sir?" inquired Lieutenant Miller.

Jimmy couldn't just remember; he didn't want to very badly. Warty had done the impossible and followed B Company to France, as he had valiantly promised long ago after his volunteer services for his country on the New Orleans' levees, and Jimmy wanted the boy to get a square

deal. The company officers already knew of Warty's persistent and shrewd endeavors to stick with his soldier friends.

"I suppose," murmured Lieutenant Miller, "this thing can be overlooked. The kid—he'll weigh up to requirements, and as he has no one to object or to give assent either, to his enlistment, he might be taken in. In one sense he might be—eighteen."

"Boy," called out Captain Banion sharply, "just how old are you, anyhow? Your case will have to be put up to the division headquarters, and maybe all the way back to Washington, before you can get in the army at all—and you can't stay up on the line unless you are. How old are you, anyhow?"

"Eighteen," answered Warty Wallace without a bat of his eye.

"When?"

"The minute that President Wilson declared war on Germany, sir. I just growed up quick on the jump—suddenly."

The group of infantrymen snickered. Corporal May repressed a smile. Captain Banion

turned away to hide his grin. The dapper lieutenant shrugged.

"Eighteen—hum! But there seems to be no opposing evidence. What'll we do about it, Captain Banion? He'll get us in trouble up here with our company on inspection."

"Report his case fully to headquarters. Meantime let him act as clerk to the top sergeant, or mess boy, or have him police around the orderly room. Keep him busy—and under Corporal May's eye, seeing that May is responsible for him. Very unmilitary—very."

The officers went on to their barracks. Corporal May turned to Warty in the gathering night. "You're in luck, kid! Now, don't spoil it, and get us both in trouble."

CHAPTER III

IN THE FLARE PIT

AFTER that came days and weeks of arduous training for the boys of B Company. Quiet, uneventful weeks as far as the great war was concerned, for no more German raiders zoomed up over the line of hills to bomb the training quarters or fields. Even the distant rumble of the great guns which came at times, when the wind from the north was strong enough, died away intermittently.

The soldiers of the first expeditionary force were scattered here and there by regiments or battalions along behind the lines where shattered hamlets and wasted fields still showed where the German invasion had reached its high tide, and in the region of France behind the great fortresses stretching from Verdun to Belfort whose strength the Kaisermen could not shake. And of course the great question of the doggedly-working doughboys of B Company was—when would

they move up a bit to get a taste of real front-line work?

By squads and platoons, under the eyes of alert French officers working with their own efficient commanders, the regiment dug and crawled, bombed and bayoneted the dummy defenders of the training trenches; had drill in gas mask defense, and were put to specialized work with the machine guns—all stiff, continuous grind, without thrills, nothing but the grim reminder that, up a few miles to the north of this pleasant summer land of France, they would soon be called to demonstrate their worth against the great organization of the last conquering Emperor.

Jimmy May felt this silent, dogged spirit; it showed itself in the splendid eagerness to learn everything which was evident in every American soldier from his Colonel down to the shortest rookie in the rear rank of the last squad. He knew that the pride of his native land was upholding them all before the eyes of the veterans of France and England, and he was grimly content.

Eight weeks of the intensive work went on. They all felt like veterans themselves now, but

Jimmy and his old comrades of the Mexican border knew better. The regiment was more than half new service men, and to the others most of the new warfare was an experiment as yet. So Jimmy and Rube Tolliver and Perkins, who had all faced death and hardship before in the Villa campaign, did not put on any airs with the novices of their squad.

Jimmy hardly had time to see his protégé, Warty Wallace, save as he ran into him now and then, in the orderly room. Warty, as he grinningly said, had managed to "hang on by his toe nails" to B Company. As the easiest way out of the difficulty, the commanding officers had recommended that he be enlisted—though it was doubted if Warty was more than sixteen. But weeks went by and no word came back from general headquarters which, as Jimmy May remarked, was probably thinking of other matters, so Warty, to his growing mortification, was compelled to be the "goat" for all the work that a taciturn top sergeant loaded on him with no rating at all, even as a civilian clerk.

Poor Warty used to grumble to Corporal May that he seemed destined to be a sort of roustabout

forever, for his beloved country, even as it was back in his days as a river rat of the Mississippi levees. Even Corporal Jimmy grew curt and military these times. The sense of great things impending made the personal matters fade away among the fellows who really took thought of what America's aid meant just now to the Allies.

Then the eventful day came when the battalion was suddenly sent up in the line to be interspersed by squad and platoon among segments of the veteran French. A "quiet sector" they termed it, but still, just over their front trenches the boys of B Company knew the enemy lay. Slowly they took up the work of the night patrols, and it was after the second of these quiet forays that Jimmy got into his most perilous adventure so far in France. His old bunky of the home service years was missing after one midnight crawl to the wires. It was as Sergeant Milbank said when he made his report to headquarters by the trench telephone:

"Ye see it's this way, Captain. These three men have always kind o' hung together in B Company—ever since old Mexican days, and, when the old organization was split, always them three

kind o' stuck to each other, so when two of 'em think that the other fellow may be lying out there in No Man's Land with his head cracked, it's hard to hold 'em in this ditch, sir."

"Nothing came back at all from the patrol?"

"Nothing, sir. It's black as tar over the top. The lookouts said once they heard kind of a little skurry over beyond the fourth wire section, where there were some little shrubs, but no shots, nor nothing. But the patrol's an hour and a half overdue, and the orders were strict to come back along the left and give us the come-in signal. It's Tolliver that's worrying the squad in my hole, sir—and Perkins and May pleading to go find him and fetch him if he's hurt."

There was a long pause down in the rock-hewn, bomb-proof shelter where the senior captain sat at a wooden table across from the company clerk who was no other than the freckled-faced, warty-knuckled, one-time stowaway, known at times as "Kid" Wallace, and again as "Warty."

Warty pretended to be mighty busy over some papers. He had not yet got over his apprehension that he would be suddenly ordered to clear

out and go back to the base camp, if not into actual custody, for he had no business up in the front lines. That was perfectly true, but as yet the industrious Mr. Wallace had been too useful to dispense with, so headquarters overlooked him. Warty was dead determined to please everybody and be so essential that the officers' room simply couldn't do without him. The officers knew this perfectly well, too, and the way they worked Warty was a caution. He never got a chance to stick his head out of the hole, or get up in a firing trench even though these were not three hundred yards distant; and the officers were grimly sure that he never would. Never, never—for a civilian clerk, and a stowaway boy at that, had no business to be here whatever.

Lieutenant Miller continued to pull his mustache and gaze absently at Warty, while he held the telephone. Then he spoke gruffly:

"Hook me onto battalion headquarters—Major Beckwith."

Warty made the connection with alacrity, and got the senior officer. He was mightily interested in the snatches of this matter involving his beloved long-legged hero, Corporal James May of

B Company. He got Major Beckwith on the line and the two officers consulted. Then Lieutenant Miller swung around in his cracker-box chair.

"All right. Get the sergeant again, Warty!" Then, into the telephone up front to the firing area: "Send four men of your squad under Corporal May, and give them strict orders to—say? Hello? Hello, there? *Hel-lo!*"

He was talking to absolute silence. Then the young lieutenant tartly flung the receiver down. "Third time it's out of whack to-day! Wallace, I'll give you a verbal order, and you get the Signal Corps, too, and explain that the wires here are always out of order. My compliments to Captain Anderson, but be firm about this telephone being absolutely rotten. But first you go up the communications and ask your way at the second cover trench where you can get to the Third Platoon of B Company in the firing section. And when you get hold of Sergeant Milbank, say to him that permission is given to send four men of the twelfth squad under Corporal May out to reconnoiter. This detail is limited strictly to thirty minutes and it must not go far-

ther to the right than the second flare pit, and it must under no circumstances fire a shot, engage in combat or do anything except ascertain, if possible, why the patrol stays so long. Now, sir, can you relate all that clearly and with force to Sergeant Milbank so that he will do the same to Corporal May?"

"Yes, sir!" cried Warty, dashing up and hunting his hat, "every word of it—*ver-battum!*"

"Good! But I doubt it. But remember that men's lives might depend on it, sir—further, that this position might; and beyond that the sector—the Army—the campaign—the war; and your country!"

"Ye-es—sir!" gasped Warty at the trench curtain, his eyes popping out as the young officer rapped out this solemn warning.

Once outside in the frosty air of the trench, he tumbled against an incoming orderly and nearly knocked him flat, and when he turned the first traverse he butted into a sentry, so intent was he on not forgetting a word of that order to the sergeant.

"Corp'rul Jimmy—four men—thirty minutes—no fightin'—second flare pit, look for patrol—

Major Beckwith—orders—" Then Warty dodged among a drowsing line of blanket-rolled soldiers, humped against the wall, waiting to take their relief, and awoke them to profanity and sleepy movements.

He went on about the traverses of the communicating trenches, the frozen sandbag parapets high above his head, and reached the cover trench under whose wooden and dirt roof the supporting squads of B Company were ensconced, also close-wrapped in their blankets.

The sergeant in charge passed him with a growl at being disturbed, and Warty went on up the zigzag narrow ditch until he came to the traverse which shut off the connecting way to the first-line firing trench. There he was directed to Sergeant Milbank who was fuming over the useless telephone.

"I'm from Company headquarters, sir, and Lieutenant Miller, and he says to send Corp'rul May over with four men to look for the first patrol. Back in thirty minutes, and to pass the word down the line another party is out front. No fightin', sir, and——"

"Hey?" snorted the sergeant, "what's this talk, you little runt?"

"Orders, sir!" retorted Warty, his eyes rolling around to take in as much of this envied firing post as he could before he had to dodge back. All he saw were frosty dirt walls and the stars over the top, and there was absolute silence everywhere. "Orders and mebbe men's lives depend on it, the Army, your country, sir—and the whole works!"

The big sergeant stared. And behind him came a burst of low, suppressed laughter. Corporal Jimmy May came out of the gloom and, shifting his rifle to another mittened hand, he bent to stare down at the courier.

"What's this little guy givin' me about savin' the country?" demanded Sergeant Milbank.

"It's Warty!" retorted the corporal. "Got up here at last, eh? Five months ago, sitting on the Mississippi levee, he swore he would."

"Well, he better beat it back," growled the old drill sergeant.

"Corp'rul Jimmy, I was sent here with orders that you go out somewhere with a squad o' men, and find Tolliver's patrol."

"All in now—except Tolliver," said the sergeant. "They must have got Tolliver, somehow."

"But orders you say, Warty—for me——"

"Yes, sir—from the major, too. You're to go out and find Tolliver, Corp'rul—the sergeant'd have had his orders direct if the telephone wasn't busted."

The sergeant looked doubtful. "Tolliver's only man missin'," he began, "and mebbe that would change things, if they knew."

"Look here," retorted Jimmy, "Tolliver's my old bunky. And this kid know's what he's saying. Sergeant, I want to go *now,* before they change any orders. Before they find the rest of the patrol's got home all right, but not knowing a thing about Tolliver."

"Well," muttered the sergeant, "go on then. You better have those men crawl out one at a time, take distance and lie down just within hail of each other, and you take the last position. Then you work around, and you can report down along the file. We don't want to bust in on any German party and get cut up just for one man, much as I'd hate to give Tolly up. Watson,

Martin, Nichols—you go over after Corporal May—keep whispering distance apart, and get that lampblack into your mugs and lie close. Hear me?"

There was a murmur in the lookout trench. Men lying forward to stare between the sandbags along their frosty rifles, turned to look as the chosen four prepared to go over the top. First they slipped from their overcoats and packs, and then they blackened their faces so that the keenest-eyed sniper, perhaps worming his way out across No Man's Land from the German trenches, could not see the lighter blur on the dark that would mark an opponent and furnish target for an instant hail from the machine guns.

Painstakingly Sergeant Milbank inspected his charges before he let them depart. Four grotesque, grimy-faced shadows the four soldiers appeared, but Sergeant Milbank was not satisfied. He wrapped rags loosely around each man's bayonet lest a star bomb up from the enemy's works catch a gleam of steel and doom the patrol to death. When he was satisfied with his handiwork, Milbank turned to Warty Wallace.

"You report, kid, that the reconnoitering party has—hello? Where's that messenger?"

"Must have pulled out. Froze up, I guess." Jimmy glanced at his black and gray ghosts already lying on their stomachs across the parapet. "All ready! Come on, follow in line, just so you can see the hump of the man's back ahead of you. No talking, no crawling anywhere right or left, without orders from me."

He swung lightly up, knelt a moment to stare into the gloom, then walked on rapidly but with stealth for the first twenty yards. Then he sat down and waited. The first file man of his patrol presently was visible back through the dark. Jimmy cautioned him down and then went on. When the Sammies' wire defenses showed up, he crawled along to the zigzag opening, waited for the file to reach him and then he went through. After that he and they, too, must crawl, crawl as Uncle Sam had taught them to crawl, without humping above the ground line any more than was needed; crawl, kicking on softly with the right leg and dragging the left, head always down, rifle across left elbow, right hand ready for a spring up if a Boche suddenly uprose to

fight it out with bayonets. And if a flare or bomb went up there was nothing to do but bury one's face in the dirt and lie there motionless, trusting that the sharpshooters and machine-gun men would mistake these gray bumps for shell-torn earth and not living men.

Between the barbed wire of the Sammies and the entanglements of the Germans, stretched some hundred yards of level but shell-riven ground. It was out here that the first patrol had crept along, seeking to discover if the Boches were working to advance their firing trenches or up to any similar mischief. Whispering the word back along the patrol to lie spread fanwise just outside their own wires and await his preliminary scouting, Corporal May crawled out alone into No Man's Land. Somewhere in that empty and deadly space in the seven-hundred foot area before his battalion sector, his lanky and silent comrade must be lying, killed, wounded, or perhaps taken stealthily into the German lines a prisoner.

Jimmy reached a cloddy hole and wormed down into it. Now he could see nothing, either before or behind him, save the blackness of the

earth where it touched the starlight. And then—yes, he did see something! A blur, a movement, to his right. His fingers closed around the small of his rifle stock, his right leg drew up under him for a spring, if this was a Boche bayoneteer. The patrols preferred not to use their rifles in an encounter in No Man's Land; the racket would draw a deadly fire that would wipe out everybody alike. Jimmy could make out a creeping figure now, coming at right angles to the path he had himself followed. He stared surprisedly. The fellow, whoever he was, was going back towards the American lines. Rapidly, too; but Jimmy knew that none of his own patrol was beyond him. It must be the missing Tolliver! Hastily Jimmy crawled about and started across his retreat, not daring to speak.

The figure paused presently. Jimmy, too, stopped, not ten feet on his flank. He watched the other and then gasped to himself:

"That's no soldier! If he is, he's a dub, and ought to be back with the dub rookies!"

For the mysterious one wasn't doing the military crawl to suit Corporal Jimmy's disciplined taste. So Jimmy slipped up and put a hand out

on the other, grabbing a dirty blouse and jerking it. He knew it was no Boche either, for he was unarmed, and none of the veteran Kaisermen would be lumbering along in this fashion. When Jimmy saw a white, dim face turned to him in surprise, he almost fainted.

"Warty! You crazy fool!"

"Hi!" whispered that wearied and chalky-faced clerk, "you, Jimmy?"

"What you doing here? Thought you went back! Ain't you no sense?"

"I give you fellows the slip while you were blackin' your faces. I knew this was the only chance I'd ever have to get out here."

"Don't you know—" gasped Jimmy, "that it's against all orders?"

"Nobody told me *not* to. Captain never even told me to hurry back."

"Of course not, you lunatic! Whoever dreamed you would sneak over the top? Your pasty, freckled mug shows up like a paper bag. Wonder they ain't nailed you with a machine volley!"

"I'm a first-class sneaker. And I—found your man."

"Found—Tolliver?" Jimmy's whisper was weak with incredulity.

"Just luck. He's dead, I guess. Lyin' on his face in a hole. I shook him and he never moved. He's not forty feet from here, and right before him I put my hand on a wire."

"Wire?"

"A little single wire, almost buried in dirt. What's that?"

Jimmy straightened out by Warty's side and put his mouth near the lad's ear. "Warty, that's our trip wire that works the flares! If you'd have sprung it you'd have played the mischief!"

"Gee!" breathed Warty, "I was afraid it was charged with electricity! I thought maybe Tolliver had been killed by it."

"Oh, you fool! They'll give me the dickens for having you out here—me and the sergeant!"

"Wasn't your fault. I knew better'n ask any permission."

Jimmy choked his wrath. "Come on, now. Straight to where you found Tolliver. Got to get him home. Got to get out of here before some Boche takes a notion to touch off a mortar bomb or shoot a star. Keep that white face of

yours turned away—towards *our* lines. All the time—hear me? Don't look towards the Germans. There's dozens of lookouts watchin' this way—every minute, every second, night and day!" Jimmy punched Warty in the ribs. "Lead on, now—but *face down!*"

"Yes," gurgled Warty, "but how far can they see—warts?"

Jimmy gasped impotently. He made up his mind he would beat this civilian clerk to a pulp once he got him back to the rest camp. He crawled on by the other's side, imagining all sorts of dire and justifiable punishments for this impudence. Presently Warty stopped and kicked a foot back to Jimmy's helmet. After waiting a watchful moment Jimmy crawled to where Warty could breathe in his ear.

"Here's the lad. Looked like he was hurt and just managed to crawl to this shell hole. Say, he's warm yet, Corp'rul."

Corporal May's hand was up to the cheek of the limp form lying in the depression. When he took it away, blood was on his fingers. He couldn't hope for much from this. Tolliver must have been struck down in the dark by an enemy

patrol not an hour ago. Slowly Jimmy drew himself up by his friend's body. There was only one thing to do. He would have to get Tolliver across his back and then stagger across No Man's Land until he met his patrol, and then on to the trenches. If the enemy discovered it and riddled them all, well—that was all in the game.

He was not at all grateful to the luckless Warty for happening to discover Tolliver. It was just fool luck, and Jimmy would have done it himself later. He was enraged at Warty for the whole mad venture. He was drawing Tolliver's limp arm out to get it across his own neck and work his shoulder under the body, when he felt Warty kick him sharply on the knee. Slowly Jimmy relaxed and looked around. And he didn't see Warty. He saw something else that made the hair rise on his neck.

Dimly against the starlight towards the German trenches he saw a man standing upright. Upright and listening and watching.

Jimmy and Warty Wallace and the senseless Tolliver were flat on their stomachs in a shallow shell depression not twenty feet from the armed German patrol!

Jimmy almost ceased to breathe. A patrol! And of course there were others! Perhaps this was the point of a real midnight attack on the American lines. The whole dark background might be filled with creeping Boches. The big clods of the shell-hole were not stiller than Corporal May and Warty Wallace. The frosty wind actually seemed hot on Jimmy's brow. Stealthily he lowered his head to the dirt and lay there.

Presently he heard a mutter, very low, but it was from the watcher. He seemed to be speaking back to some one. Then he came on a few feet, stopped, looked, listened. Then he knelt down. Jimmy could just see his crouched shoulders. The German seemed to be searching for something.

Then the matter flashed on Jimmy's confused mind. The patrol was searching for the trip wire! The American trip wire that had been laid out many nights ago by furtive working parties, and which ran to the little narrow pits which contained the flares. There were four of these hidden contrivances out beyond the Sammies' wire entanglements, along the battalion sector,

crude but effective devices consisting of a plank balanced in a narrow pit, lying horizontally when at rest, and containing at one end a tin reflector before which was fixed a magnesium flare cartridge. From this cartridge a quick fuse led to the base of the pit where it was affixed to a cap. Now at the other end of the balanced plank, lying hidden in the pit, was an iron weight, and this heavier end was held down by a touch-and-go trigger to which the trip wires were attached, and these trip wires ran out for sixty feet each way from the flare. So delicately hung were the triggers that the least jerk on the wires released the weighted end of the plank. It shot down in the pit, struck the primer, and the fuse ignited the magnesium flare just as it arose six feet above the earth and shot a powerful light on all the ground towards the enemy. The reflector kept the light on them while shielding the defenders from every ray.

The patrols were searching for the flare pits. They had found the trip wires, but these they dared not touch, for any movement would spring the triggers and ignite the brilliant lights, be-

traying every move to the Sammies. And instantly Jimmy knew what was on.

They were ready to attack in force. The Boche patrols were merely clearing the way, silently, and this man kneeling not eight yards from Corporal Jimmy was seeking to put that signal flare out of business so that the assault could reach the American entanglements at least before it was discovered.

"He'll cut the fuse, or jam the pivot," thought Jimmy. "Then he'll sneak back. Maybe they spoiled the other flares, too. *Got* to stop him!"

He tried to pierce the darkness beyond the groping figure of the German. He put his ear against the wind, listening for their footsteps, sure that the first wave was over the top of their trenches and lying down perhaps even beyond their wires waiting for the advance. The faint reverberation of a gun far off to the left was all that broke the stillness; the artillery on this sector had been merely waiting for some days, content with keeping the other side's operations down to a minimum. But Jimmy knew that the ever alert battery commanders were ready and with the range, and that at any sign of a raid from either

side the fieldpieces and machine guns would hurl death into the disputed area. Here where he and Warty lay, midway between the wire entanglements, the danger was as great from one side as the other.

But the Boches were coming at last! That was the great, big fact that kept beating on his brain. The patrols had surprised Tolliver alone, and had evaded the others; then, when the Sammies' reconnaissance was ended, their advance parties had crept out to disable the signal flares and allow the assaulting wave to creep nearer before the final attack.

The German patrol was creeping on hands and knees across the front of the shell-hole where Warty and Jimmy lay. The wire was there, and leading to the pit some ten yards to the right. And Jimmy, revolving the chances desperately in his mind, concluded that the German must not be allowed to disable the danger signal.

"I can spring it myself," thought Corporal May; "if the Boches are out in front, then the flare will show 'em to our fellows—they won't get any nearer to our lines!"

But to spring that flare meant to rise, dash

towards the enemy's line, seize the trip wire and release the trigger. Then he would have to seek cover instantly before the fire blazed out from his front trenches upon the invaders. Slowly he twisted about so that his arm stole over Warty's shoulder.

"Listen, kid. Don't move—whatever starts, now—don't stick even your little finger out of this hole. And if Tolly isn't dead, and should come to his senses, keep him down. Hold him down by force! And wait for me—don't come out no matter what happens!"

"What—" whispered Warty, "what you after now?"

But Corporal Jimmy had gone out of the hole, dragging himself carefully along, trying to keep his eyes on the outline of the patrol to his right. If the fellow discovered and rushed him, they would have to fight it out, silently and alone, that was all. The supporting Boches might come to aid the scout, or they might not. If they did, Jimmy was a goner. But now he was seeking the trip wire. He couldn't see the patrol at all now; and then his hand found the tiny wire with the dirt scattered to conceal it. And stooping,

Jimmy jerked it and then ran straight back towards the shell-hole to get out of the flare's radius. But nothing happened. Jimmy stopped in his tracks.

"The Boche has got to the flare!" he gasped. Then, wheeling to his right, he dashed silently for the pit. He reached it just as a shuffling figure turned from the hole. The German thought it was one of his comrades apparently, coming from his own side, for he did not stir until Jimmy was right above him. Only his head and body to the waist were above the flare pit.

Jimmy flung up his rifle for a butt stroke across the German's skull. But he heard a muffled cry, the fellow dodged flat in the pit and Jimmy's rifle butt cut the air. And instantly he dropped the gun. It was no good for what he had to do. He whirled and dropped straight upon his enemy's head and shoulders—as he thought. But the other man whipped to one side and Corporal May fell feet foremost into the flare pit. He was up in a flash, and the two faced each other silently. The German had a whistle between his lips, and he had started a low, purring alarm with it, when Jimmy dashed it away. Then the Boche

smashed Jimmy in the face, leaning over the plank arm of the flare; and Jimmy in his turn dealt a blow back that staggered the patrol. He was now trying to get a trench knife from his belt, and Corporal May closed with him, arms locked over arms; and the two fought in silence.

Jimmy was trying to close his hands about the other man's throat, intent on preventing him from summoning aid. The German was fighting to keep the pit flare from igniting, and to disable his enemy in any way, fists, feet, fingers, so that he could keep the danger signal stilled. He was a heavier, older man than Corporal Jimmy, but this, in the narrow hole, was a disadvantage. When Jimmy staggered him with a butt of his head the patrol half fell in the pit alongside the flare arm, and he literally stuck between the clay walls. Jimmy was on him then, jumping and jamming his own body onto the other. The German grunted and struck helplessly up.

"You're down!" gasped the Corporal; "now, that flare arm—let it go!"

For the other hung desperately to the plank, trying to keep it horizontal alongside his body. And Jimmy was trying to smash it down so that

the other end with the magnesium cartridge would go up. If he could explode that flare now, the trick would be up, whatever it was. The Boche knew it as well as Corporal May. He ceased striking at Jimmy's face and hung to the wooden arm. And Jimmy began to pummel him viciously with straight, hard blows full on the mouth. The German was game. He did not raise a hand from the flare arm, but took the savage punishment as long as he could. Then slowly, with a gasp, he began to relax his hold. No human being could endure the flailing Jimmy handed him. Suddenly, with a guttural cry, the Boche dropped the wooden arm, fought himself to his feet and struck back at Corporal May. And Jimmy was waiting for just that moment. He threw himself forward with all his weight, forced the arm down between his own body and the German's, and then he felt the heavy hammer iron strike the percussion primer. There was a flash of burning fuse in the other end of the pit, and then, like lightning, the magnesium light burst out.

The German leaped across at Jimmy with an oath. And again the two fought like rough-and-

tumble schoolboys in the pit mouth. But the Boches' trick was done. Jimmy heard a cry somewhere, and he was conscious that the intolerable light, six feet above his head, was throwing a vast radiance over the German lines. Arms locked about his enemy's neck, he dragged and pressed him lower; and over the pit's edge he saw now, in the magnesium's glare, the shadowy, skulking figures of a line of enemies. Their astonished faces shone white in the light. Towards the American lines it was pitchy dark. And then a little spurt of fire leaped out, another and another, all along from every firing post. And suddenly the clatter of a machine gun awoke far to the left, and then back of it the bark of a trio of three-inch guns.

Jimmy tugged mercilessly to drag his prisoner below the pit's edge. It was death for them both to be above. And the last glimpse he got of the German assault wave was of groups and single figures breaking from the line and fleeing back.

But Corporal May had no time to gaze upon the weird night battle going on above him. He had forced and beaten his man down flat on his

back in the bottom of the flare pit. The German raised his hands at last.

"Kamerad!" he begged, "I surrender."

Jimmy staggered to the end of the pit and sat down. He couldn't get out while the star bombs and the flare mortars made the whole of No Man's Land as light as day. He watched the bursts of shrapnel.

"Anyhow," muttered Jimmy, "that's a surprise raid that was beaten at the start! I hope Warty had sense enough to keep flat in his hole!"

It was an hour before the alarmed Sammies let up on their fire. When the last fitful bomb had died down, Jimmy crawled to the shell hole. He discovered something that made him want to whoop joyfully. Tolliver lay with his eyes open, and Warty was dripping water from the soldier's canteen on a ragged cut upon his head.

"When they got me, I don't know," said Tolliver. "Must have clubbed me in the dark! But that bombardment brought me to the earth again."

"Some fireworks!" whispered Warty Wallace; "wouldn't have missed it for anything. Scared me out of a year's growth, Corp'rul Jimmy!"

"Out of here!" ordered Corporal Jimmy; "crawl home now, and quick! Can you make it, Tolly, alone?"

"Guess I got to. Little weak on my pins, but——"

"I think you *have* got to, for I'm bringing in a prisoner! First one for B Company, and he gave me a pretty fight!"

Jimmy watched his two friends crawl away in the dark towards the Sammies' lines. Then he went exultantly back to peer down in the flare pit.

"Hey, you," he whispered, "Fritzie, come on out o' there!"

Jimmy stared down. The flare pit was empty. And Corporal May lay on his stomach and growled, the most disgusted Sammy in all Pershing's forces.

"Stung!" he murmured. "Now that gang back in the rest trenches will swear I was bluffing!"

Then Jimmy wearily began the long crawl back to the first-line trenches where he found a big sergeant gazing hopelessly at Warty Wallace, and listening to that individual's account of it.

"Can you beat it?" queried Sergeant Milbank. "What'll we do with this kid now? He'll be too chesty to be officers' clerk after this; and you and me, Jimmy, will get an awful skinnin' for ever lettin' him go over the top!"

But in the warm commendation which Corporal May's exploit won from the officers when the report of the patrol was made and vouched for, their dereliction was not mentioned. Warty Wallace was the one who got the censure. He was ordered detached from his clerical job in B Company's orderly room and sent back to brigade headquarters. Very much crestfallen and fearsome for his career, was Warty, too; and Corporal May felt sorry for the lad. But when the battalion was sent back a few miles to a rest camp for ten days, Jimmy was surprised one morning, to have a short, healthy young rookie walk in on him, salute with a mocking grin and then let an unmilitary yell.

"Get onto this," cried Warty, slapping his khaki-clad legs. "I'm a soldier now, yes, sir! They kept me around the Y quarters a week, trying to make up their minds to slate me there for good, I reckon. They made me work, too—

everybody makes me work, wherever I turn up —and then finally one day this Y. M. C. A. man handed me an order—yes, sir, Corporal—a regular military order—telling me to report to the medical examiners, and all. Went through like a top, Corporal Jimmy—but when they got to my age, there was a kind of silence. I hated to lie —Jimmy, you know that. So I just said sort of a *gulp*—and the young doctor he sighed and scratched over some papers and then he sat back looking at me. He'd been told about me, I reckon. Seems like the whole military administration, whenever I buck up against it, sort of winks and looks the other way. But me—I'm no blamed civilian any more—I'm a soldier now!"

"That's tough on the Army," commented Jimmy, dryly, "everybody'll be catching warts from you!"

"G'wan, now, Corporal! Don't josh me! I want to get assigned to B Company. Just now they got me in a sort of refit squad along with some fellows who just got out of hospital and are picking up the work again. But when your

bunch goes up front again, I want to be with 'em!"

"Sometime, when General Pershing isn't busy, I'll speak to him about it," retorted Jimmy, "and look sharp, there, now! There comes an officer! See if you can come to the position of a soldier and salute him!"

"Watch me," whispered Private Warty Wallace, stiffening up like a ramrod, eyes front; and the forefinger of his right hand jerked up to his new hatbrim as the officer passed. Corporal May stood like a statue, then snapped his own arm down again.

"Private Wallace," he said, "you're a soldier now. We'll cut out the joshing!"

CHAPTER IV

UNDER THE TOP

CORPORAL JIMMY did not see the overseas rooky which the American Army had acquired under protest, as it were, for some time after the flare pit adventure. Private Warty Wallace was assigned to a new training contingent of the more recently arrived troops; while Jimmy, after the ten days on rest, was sent back with his battalion to the front trenches. The fellows were eager to be up and in it again, especially as it was rumored that now they would go "on their own," and not be interspersed with the veteran French soldiers so carefully. It meant that they were earning the trust of their higher command and the alert instructors.

So, one raw and rainy night B Company swung off in column of squads on a muddy road that led to the first communication trenches. At first these were mere depressions stretching out through a rough field, but they deepened, grad-

ally, first to the Sammies' waists, then to their shoulders, and on, until they led into the narrow ways which zigzagged up to the front lines. Then B Company lay for twenty-four hours off duty in the dugouts, waiting to take its turn in the firing pits. They were all fit and ready, fed up and lusty, and with a feeling of joyous confidence in themselves.

And the next night, just after dark, the squads stole on up to the dark first lines, relieving the tired watchers who passed them silently back to the dugouts. Then came an order that put Corporal May in a new and trying experience, even for his steady nerves. With his old bunky, Eddie Perkins, he had been sent up the deep, narrow underground passage to a listening post.

For three hours, crouched in the narrow pit between the boarded sides which dripped ceaselessly with cold and dirty water, Jimmy had waited. Now and then the raw wind whipped down the square little wooden aperture over his head between the limbs of the bit of brush which concealed the opening of the listening post. Looking up, Jimmy could see a faint star through the misty night; and now and then he arose,

stepped on the second round of the short ladder and thrust his head up cautiously to the top of this wooden box.

Twenty yards away he could just make out the dim blur of the wire defenses of the American front line, and beyond that his vivid imagination pictured enemies crawling past their own entanglements for a raid on the Sammies' trenches. For three minutes he listened and heard nothing save the rustle of the wind in the branches of the camouflage and the beating of his own heart. Then Jimmy crawled back to sit on the heels of his high trench boots in the sticky, miry clay at the end of the post.

He looked back trying to see Private Perkins who sat on the edge of a piece of plank three paces rear.

"Another hour of this," whispered Jimmy, "and then—relief. This is a quiet sector, eh? That's what's the matter with it—it's maddening. Listen! Is that our sappers, now, or the Germans?"

They could hear along the board wall to the left, a faint tapping, muffled, indistinguishable;

at times wholly lost, though that was the worst moment of all, for the watchers in the listening post felt that then, at any moment, might come that most dreaded of all things to the trench fighters, the explosion of a mine under their feet, to the right, left—anywhere, to blow them to fragments or bury them under masses of smoking earth.

Two days ago the listening post, established more to keep guard against assault over the top and through the wires, had heard the underground workers. At the first detection of it the engineers attached to the battalion, working in conjunction with experienced French officers, had started a tunnel to countermine the Boches' project. That was all that could be done, and the worst of it was that the enemy had started first, and it was all guesswork as to where he was coming. They had heard the picks and boring tools, but the exact location of these sounds eight feet or maybe more under the ground was difficult. Fifteen yards back from the listening post the engineers had dug in at right angles to the trench and then pushed forward and deeper, for,

as far as could be determined, the enemy sap was coming on the left.

But Corporal Jimmy and Private Perkins up in the listening post knew almost nothing of this. The sound of their own sappers had grown fainter as they progressed further to the left. The two soldiers were out at the end of the listening post thirty yards beyond the most advanced firing trenches of their comrades, and here they must wait until the next relief came and they could go back to the cover trenches to rest over-strained nerves and get sleep and food.

"Don't know which relief'll get it," mumbled Perkins, "if the Fritzies blow off first. If they do, it'll be when they think they're under our main trenches, and whoever happens to be out here will have a fine chance when the rush comes. They'll be lookin' for just such holes as we're in."

"Sure—if they get by with it. I guess our buckies will have something to say about that rush —even a mine isn't going to get all of 'em, Perky. And our engineers will have something to say, too—first."

"Mebbe," grumbled the doubter. "What's that

Kipling poem you was spoutin' just before we started out here?"

"But once in awhile, we can finish in style,
Which I 'ope it don't 'appen to me!"

quoted Jimmy softly. He leaned back with his ear against the wall.

"I get 'em again—off to the left, and forward. But the engineers say you can't tell nothing about it—except it's there."

He stood up and stretched himself in the deep, narrow pit. It was black as tar in there. The only good thing was that it was warmer than back in the firing trenches where the advanced squads lay at the lookouts, or back in the communicating trenches, or even in the cover pits where the men not on immediate duty dozed in blankets and ponchos. Warmer, but always the listeners and the first-line men were under that terrible strain of knowing that along this bit of the sector a German sap was advancing. If it was not countermined by our engineers it meant swift death for some group of the Sammies. The soldiers in the "T" trenches, the little isolated pits occupied each by a squad, and cut off from the

adjoining units by thick walls of earth to lessen the destruction of just such operations, or the chance landing of a shell in any one trench, had got word of the sap coming from the invisible and silent enemy—and it got on their nerves. They had been under the first shell fire, and had heard the ceaseless whining of the German snipers' bullets over their heads spattering into the muddy back walls and grazing on over the whole trench system behind, and after a week were tolerably used to this. But to sit in dark and silence, knowing that at any moment, at any spot they might be blown clean out of the earth—that was something which the alert, nervous Americans found harder than any assault. They would have welcomed an order to go "over the top" and at the Boches, artillery support or not. But nothing like that was started as yet for the green Sammies. Beyond the continual but desultory indirect fire of the guns back of them pounding away somewhere on the German communications, there was no sign of an advance on the enemy. They knew they would not go over the top until the guns had smashed up the near trenches and the wire defenses, and Black Jack

Pershing apparently was not ready for that yet.

Private Perkins got up and flapped his arms about, following his noncom's example.

"War," commented the fat soldier, "is the most lonesome job there is. I'd rather be back in Mexico where we could yell a bit. Here, everything we do is done in the dark. Sit down in the mud and keep your trap closed. Remember the sludgy, rainy old night we left the billet and hiked forward in heavy kit? We all felt fit as razors and thought there would be something doing at last. And on we splashed, and Tolliver he started our old chantey:

"Ramble, ramble—ramble with a pack!
Enough to break your back,
You ramble 'til the——"

"Dry up!" ordered Jimmy

"That's what they told Tolliver. No sing, no talk, no smoke—no nothing," whispered Perky. "We marched forward in the dark one night into the reserve trenches, and the next night, in the dark, they put us up in the firing trenches. Then they make us crawl up here in the dark the next night. Between times we sit in the bottom of a

seven-foot ditch and look up at the sky. I tried to look over the top once and the sergeant he jerks my collar until my teeth is loose. I sit down in the mud and along comes a couple of them engineers and drops a load of two-by-four scantling on me toes. I gets up like a gentleman to let 'em pass, and somebody yells 'sit down!' and heaves a can of biscuit at me. A fat gent like me is always in the way, so I sits down and waits 'til it's dark again."

"Sit down!" growled Jimmy, "you're rocking the trench!"

Private Perkins eased the web brace of his pack, and sat down.

He sighed. "There it goes again—*sit down!*"

Corporal Jimmy looked at the luminous dial of his watch. Half past one, and they had half an hour more until relief. Again he made his periodical inspection of the front through the listening post aperture. The Sammies didn't really expect any attack in force these nights, but they felt that the seasoned German veterans over the way might indulge in patrol raids just to try the morale of the new foes from overseas. Not a bucky in Jimmy's whole regiment had even seen

a Boche as yet, and they thought it impolite to be introduced by an underhand, underground mine. If the Germans had thought over the whole scheme of modern war for a method to try the nerves of inexperienced men they couldn't have hit on a better way than this stealthy, slow, uncertain menace of a mine coming forward to the trenches.

The two listeners sat in silence and the dark again. It was Perky's turn at the wooden box now, and he crawled over Jimmy's legs to the end of the passage. While he was standing up to the ladder there came the low buzzing of the telephone a few yards back in the trench. Jimmy slipped quickly back and picked up the receiver. B Company's senior captain spoke briefly from the officers' post hewn deeply into the rock back in the communicating trench system. Headquarters, which was the brain and nerve center of all the labyrinth occupied by the platoons and squads, must be safe from any chance shell just as were the magazine rooms and the dressing stations.

"Corporal May?"

"Yes, sir," responded Jimmy alertly. "All quiet, sir."

"The second relief will be advanced fifteen minutes. You will, therefore, leave the man with you in charge of the post and report at once to Lieutenant Sage of the Engineers in the sap running from your tunnel. Hold yourself for duty as he directs, sir."

"Yes, sir."

That was all. Jimmy hung the receiver up in the dark. Then he went feeling his way forward to Private Perkins at the listening hole.

"Stick it out here, Perky, until the relief. I'm going into the left tunnel for something or other. Now keep your eye and ear to this box, so that the next detail knows what a guy you are for work. And when you get back to cover hunt a dry pair of socks out of my stuff and have 'em for me. It'll be wet down there."

"Right-o. And if anything blows up meantime, and me here——"

"We'll take care of your remains, bucky."

"Ree-mains? I'll look out for my remains. If the Fritzies rush this old cave, I'll be two jumps

ahead of 'em and carry my own remains along with me. So long, Corporal."

And Jimmy backed away with a laugh. He liked Perkins immensely. It was hard to get nervous and depressed with this comical and corpulent comrade, who, with all his apparent shiftlessness and indifference, was as brave and reliable as they come. The worst thing about Perky was that he did not always see the necessity of the iron discipline and order of the new warfare.

Corporal May went back through the dark. When he came to the intersection of the sap running off at right angles to the tunnel which led to the listening post he saw a dim incandescent light and heard the low noise of the air pump which enabled the workers to burrow blindly into the earth. The engineering officers, to his surprise, were just passing into a new hole that led to the right of the tunnel. Lieutenant Sage turned to Corporal May as Jimmy saluted and reported for duty.

"The left sap has been abandoned as the detectors seem to indicate that the enemy work is coming to the right hand. We are driving in

there, but we wish to keep watch in the old tunnel: Captain Banion says you are a good man for the job."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"Take it for an hour, and we will then send relief. Our men have heard nothing there for more than a day. The sap struck some bad rock ledges, and can't be pushed very rapidly, and besides there is reason to think that the Germans are boring on the right. Perhaps they are hitting forward on each side—that's why you are needed to listen for any resumption of work on that side. If you catch any sound at all report to me at once."

"Yes, sir. Do my best, sir."

The lieutenant turned and went into the new right-hand bore. Jimmy could see the dim lights beyond the rough, narrow walls of clay. Under foot, along the single plank track upon which the excavated earth was laboriously hauled, were the air hose and the insulated lighting wires, but he could not see the workers, for the sap did not run straight but was driven with all speed through the easiest going in the general desired direction to intercept the enemy's work. But the Corporal

turned to the left into the abandoned sap. It was not a pleasing detail. There were no lights at all until he turned on the pocket flash which the officer had provided. It just lit up the rough narrow way, the boulders projecting through the red earth, and Jimmy crawled and stumbled on and down, conscious that the air was not at all good, and he would be lucky if he could stick his hour. It was part of his off-duty time, also, but he did not grumble. Some eighty feet away he came to the end of the working. A drift of dirty sand and huge fragments of limestone barred the way. The sappers had skirted around the rock in one place, leaving a narrow cleft, and then had been ordered out. Jimmy was to spend a lonesome hour lying along this slit to discover what he might with an unaided ear. He heard nothing save the vague sounds of his own party working off to the right and he studied to recognize these faint indications so that he might distinguish any new sound of boring ahead of him.

He shut off his flashlight and lay down in the cleft along the great buried boulder.

"The air's mighty bad, that's a fact. Those

fellows expect one to put up with anything when a man is on duty alone!"

Under him in the chunky sand he discovered a narrow boring shovel, and sitting up he jabbed the steel into the wall ahead to make more room for his shoulders so that he could crawl clear to the end of the hole. The closer he got to the solid earth the better he might catch any faint sound beyond.

"Nothing doing," he muttered, after ten minutes of listening. "If the Boches are on this side, they're too far to detect. Anyhow, it's not so hard on the nerves as hearing *something,* and not knowing where or what."

So he crawled and kicked into the loose sand around the rock. Then he lay still again to rest and fume against the close air of the sap. He would stay a few minutes and then crawl back to where there was more room and oxygen, and come in again when he felt better.

After a few minutes Jimmy was slowly aware that he *did* feel better! He raised his head from his arm and sniffed. Then he drew a long breath. A flicker of newer air seemed before his nose. He studied this phenomenon awhile, and then

stretched himself out and dug his way closer along the bowlder into the cleft.

The air *was* fresher! It was coming from somewhere ahead, too! He stared into the pitch dark, trying to realize that fact. Then he shot his flashlight on. He saw nothing but the bulge of the rock and the side of sandy clay. But he heaved forward into this narrowing cleft, and dug with hands and elbows. Now he knew there was air coming from some subterranean passage. Perhaps it was a natural cavern beyond the rock; perhaps it was—it couldn't be possible that the engineers had abandoned the sap just before it opened on the German tunnel! They would have detected the enemy workers long before that.

But he determined to see. He lay quiet for a time and his stirring imagination began to pick up sounds—gnomes of the hill caverns of France, or crafty, scientific invaders of her soil—whatever it was, it was something. Jimmy wormed his way on, wallowing the sand back of his knees. Chunks of it fell on his shoulders; he pushed this back too, conscious that he need not fear for air. It was coming gently past the tiny crevice of the rock. The sounds seemed to be a gentle

purring and not drills or picks. Jimmy thought he ought to be sure ere he hastened back to report to the engineers. He dug another two feet around the bulge of rock, and was reaching ahead to fork the dirt back under his breast, when he found he was scratching some new substance. It was not rock, or sandy clay. His finger tips dug along it. Then carefully he drew his flashlight on past his chin and turned it on. The blur of light in the crevice lit up wood! New, rough planking!

Jimmy relaxed his tense body, so surprised that he nearly whistled. On the silence now came that purr again.

"There's an air exhaust going *somewhere!* But not near me!" He studied it over. Then he determined to explore, and shutting off the light he burrowed busily for some minutes, enlarging his hole and drawing his head and shoulders nearer the boarding. And to his surprise the sand began to pack down loosely under his elbows. Then he guessed the puzzle. The Boches had driven past this sandy spot and had been compelled to bulkhead it up.

"Passed it!" muttered Jimmy. "That is why

we couldn't hear 'em when the fellows were so close! They've got so far past that they are clean up under our firing trenches and sapping either way for their mines. We couldn't hear 'em because they are working so cautiously now, digging out bit by bit and carrying the earth back! I'm just alongside their tunnel running to the working-head!"

He must get back now and report this imminent danger. Even now the Germans might have laid their explosives under the American trenches and be prepared to retreat to their own lines and touch the spark that would hurl his comrades to death. Then they would dash forward over No Man's Land and seize the crater and as much of the other trench system as they could against the demoralized defenders. The artillery would concentrate for a barrage upon the American communications to prevent aid coming to the assaulted section. Or perhaps the Germans were out of this sap with everything ready, and were waiting for another tunnel to be completed over to the right where the American engineers were now boring their countermine. This must be so, for the suspicious sounds now

seemed to be on that side. But the counterwork was too late in that case. If the Germans suspected that their plans were known they would blow up the mines already laid and attack instantly.

"Got to beat it quick," thought Jimmy, and he tried to squirm back from the enemy's barricades. But this was not easy. His big boots scuffed against the rock and in the sand. He determined to crouch around against the boards and go out headfirst. There was a space now along the bulkhead. In fact Jimmy discovered that he could almost look above it into the German tunnel. The sand behind it had been loosely shoveled in along the rock from their side.

Jimmy was scratching around cautiously when a gleam of light showed through a half-inch crack where he packed the sand under him. He put an eye to this and looked. The light was some distance down the rough tunnel. He could hear the air pump faintly throbbing. The electric light wires and the air connections must run right along at the foot of the bulkhead just as it would be in the Americans' tunnel. But Corporal May was not intent on further scouting. He had to

report and quick before something happened. Then his ear caught a new sound. Some one was coming along the passage. He lay out limply in the sand, his eye to the crack of the boards. First grotesque shadows flickered along the opposite wall. Then figures shambled along. He saw the dirty gray of the German sappers, not one, but a dozen, with picks and tools. Guttural talk and whispers came, and then the gruff command of some officer cautioning silence.

Jimmy hardly breathed. It was his first sight of the enemy, and were the crack wide enough he could have touched their clothes!

He dared not move now. Discovery would mean not only his capture, but a terrible disaster to his whole battalion, perhaps. The file of workers passed, and after waiting a bit Jimmy started to turn for his slow crawl back. Then he heard another noise—in his own tunnel, this time, back around the bulge of the great bowlder. The relief had come; some fool N. C. O., or perhaps one of the Engineering officers, had led the way into the abandoned sap to inquire what Jimmy had discovered. Voices were raised —they were surprised that the lone sentry had

disappeared. Jimmy started again to worm out along the boarding when he heard more voices nearer. On the German side this time!

And he stopped in a sudden panic. The Boches must not hear the Sammies poking about, asking for Jimmy May's whereabouts. He must obstruct that narrow cleft through which he had crawled, and the only way was to hump his own back against it and lay with his knees doubled up pushing against the boarding. Again he saw shadows passing the crack of light. The Germans stopped for some purpose; he heard one mutter something, and another laugh. They struck a match and the low talk went on. A mass of sandy clay fell from the stuff above and thudded on Jimmy's head and shoulders. He moved to get his face above it, wondering if it was audible in the tunnel.

And then it seemed as if the bulkhead was pressing inward with his added weight. It was only a light, temporary boarding to hold back the sand, and the stakes were not driven deeply.

"She's caving in!" gasped Jimmy, "sure as shootin'! Oh, won't those fellows move on? I'll be dumped right out at their feet!"

He had pressed his back desperately into the hole toward the American sap to check their voices, but this was what had started the flimsy boarding to give way. He heard dirt rattle down beneath him, and then the slow breaking of some splinters. And still the Germans in the tunnel gabbled on maddeningly. If they suspected the spot, a single bayonet thrust through the cracks would end Corporal May's career in France. And then the mines would blot out half the battalion in the first-line trenches.

Jimmy lay grimly tense thinking of it all. He couldn't do a thing, he hardly dared gasp for breath in the slowly dropping earth on his face. But presently he heard the Boches shamble on, arguing in low tones, going to the head of the sap. And before they had gone out of sound, Jimmy felt the bottom boards give out with a smash of loose dirt. He sank above this, his head struck another board which pulled from the light nails, and then he was fighting in a slow slide of sand. He couldn't get back up, and the next minute he found himself rolled out fair in the German tunnel with the caving earth following.

He sat up and stared. There were a few dim

lights in either direction. But no one was in sight. A few earth baskets and sacks were scattered along the narrow tunnel. If there was any work going on up ahead it must be around the corners where the mines would be projected under the American trenches.

Jimmy scrambled to his feet. "I can't stay here!" he muttered. "First man along will discover this cave-in now! I got to tear down that bulkhead more and fight back through the sand! Quick, too!"

He jerked aside another board and scrambled into the sand seeking his exit. It had widened considerably now until he reached the clay around the big rock, and here Jimmy was drawing his body through when he heard a low yell ahead. A dazzling light was flung in his eyes.

"Be still!" he gasped. "Cut out that noise! I'm in their tunnel!"

Then he saw he had been using highly unmilitary language to Lieutenant Sage of the Engineers, who knelt in the excavated portion of the sap, staring at Corporal May's head and shoulders.

"Struck it?" said the officer, quietly. "Sure, sir?"

"I *fell* into it, sir! And they'll discover I did, in a minute! They're clear up under our lines, sir! Wires laid along the sap, sir! If they discover that we know——"

The officer turned hastily, speaking back to men behind him. Then he crouched down to Jimmy's ear.

"Too late to countermine, then. Let a bombing squad through and clear 'em out."

"Yes, but the wires, sir. They can blow the thing, sir, any time!"

"Cut those wires. Here's clippers, sir. Destroy every wire in the tunnel. We'll be through after you." Then he turned again: "Get those shovel men busy on this—and send for Lieutenant Miller's bombing party. Quick work there!"

Jimmy tore and smashed at the wiring. The instant resourcefulness of the officer communicated at once to his alert mind. He had to cut those wires! Then they would fight it out in the tunnel.

Back he wormed and crawled. Down the four-foot slide of sand, and rolling under the broken



A dazzling light was flung in his eyes.

bulkhead to the tunnel bed. Then along the dimly-lighted chamber to where the wiring clung to the foot of the wall. Half a dozen insulations were there, and first Jimmy gave a swift glance around to be sure they were all. Then he grabbed the bundle, hoping desperately there were no unprotected currents, and slashed into them with his heavy cutters. And the third wire he snipped plunged the tunnel into pitch darkness. The thing would be discovered now when the Germans came hurrying to find what was wrong with the tunnel lights.

Jimmy tore and smashed at the wiring. Afraid of the loose ends, he dashed back a yard or so and cut and jerked until he knew every communication was destroyed from the German trenches to the mine head.

Then two things broke on his fretting senses at the same instant. One was a bewildered shout somewhere ahead. And the other was the sound of struggling bodies in the crumbling entry from the American sap. In pitch darkness the eager Sammies were pouring through. Somebody pitched into him, and spoke, and Jimmy knew it was his own beloved Senior Captain.

He grasped Captain Banion's sleeve. "There's a light coming up at the head, sir—a flashlight, I guess. But the wires are cut, sir!"

"Take both ways, you men!" shouted the officer. "Go clean on until you let 'em have it. They're all trapped up forward!"

And the next instant the deafening explosion of a bomb came back towards the German lines. The charging Sammies along the narrow pit had encountered some work party hurrying forward. A ragged, eager yell went up—and then another bomb, and after that the air was thick with acrid fumes. But nothing more was needed. The Boches fled from the tunnel, and the Americans threw up a barricade across the passage.

Up the other end the ceremonies were short. Two rifle shots were fired around the corner of the sap angle, a peremptory command or two were given; and ten minutes later a helpless German engineer surrendered with twenty-six astonished workers, one of whom had got a bullet through the thigh, and that was all the casualties.

When Lieutenant Sage of the Engineers came back from a survey of the deadly explosives laid

at the sap head he discovered Captain Banion of the Infantry checking off the dirty-garbed prisoners as they filed into the American tunnel. When the last was through, the two officers discovered Corporal Jimmy May being dusted off hastily by Private Perkins who seemed speechless with regret and amazement. He grumbled enviously:

"First man to get at 'em, eh? Might have knowed it! Next time I'm goin' to hang right onto your shirt-tail when you go anywhere!"

CHAPTER V

CLOSE WORK

A THOUSAND feet above the far-flung battle line in Eastern France Corporal Jimmy May stood idly against the steel lattice basket of the observation balloon and amused himself by sending joshing messages down to where he knew B Company, and especially Eddie Perkins in the communicating and rest trenches, would be watching, for they knew that Jimmy had gone out this afternoon with an officer of the Signal Corps for training in the two-arm semaphore code. Not that Corporal May needed any added proficiency in handling the flags or sending code, for he was an expert in this long before he crossed the water, but getting it over from the swaying gas bag and in the cramped space of the underhanging basket was another thing. And the higher command had decided that certain intelligent and nervy N. C. O.'s of the line should work along with the regular Signal Corps men

just to have them ready for use. Every unit of the Army must contain men who could be called in emergencies to any sort of job.

Jimmy had been up three times on observation with Lieutenant Cook. The dizzy altitude and the movement of the basket at the end of the long cable no longer bothered him; and even when from the distant German lines there came bursts of shrapnel showering down in the American trenches below him Jimmy had only watched it with professional interest. In the "quiet sector" to which the training of the balloon service men had been assigned, the German trenches were some mile and a half from the American advanced works, and the observers to-day were more intent on problems of meteorology and windage and the lay of the land than watching any possible troop movement behind the enemy lines. So Corporal May had little to do beyond intently listening to the instruction of the signal officer.

"Call up the windlass men, Corporal, and have 'em give us two thousand feet—we'll be able to pick up some of their lines at that altitude, behind that little ridge to the left. Might as well

put you onto a little scouting, and see what sort of report you can turn in."

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy turned alertly to the telephone that led down the slender wire cable to the windlass station which controlled the observation balloon. The sergeant below answered lazily, but presently the observers knew that the big bag was swinging up and off in the breeze towards the distant No Man's Land.

A thousand feet more brought a wide radius into their vision. Just below Jimmy could see the series of communication trenches of the Sammies, and the little "T" pits that sheltered the front-line squads. Far off to the rear a convoy crawled along under the shelter of a low, brown hill. Jimmy had learned his land well on the American side; he knew just where the next observation balloon a mile down the line took up its section of the map, for he had traced the whole terrain laboriously yesterday, tree and ridge and creek and ruined hamlet.

He ceased playing with the semaphore flags which were used only in emergencies in balloon signaling, and took up the powerful binoculars;

and, seated comfortably down where the keen wind of December was less cutting, he began a painstaking and methodical survey of the sector of the German territory that was assigned to this observation post. With the longer line at the two-thousand-foot altitude the cylindrical gas bag plunged and yawed, and now and then the observers discovered it was enveloped in patches of low flying cloud that rolled up from the west.

"Going to ruin our visibility over there," said Lieutenant Cook, with a gesture towards the German land. "As the sun swings lower, though, we can map out some preliminary work and then to-morrow you can compare it with a new map and see how well you stack up. Now what do you make off to the right behind their first salient—that bulge around the wooded ridge?

"Of course," he said, a moment later, "there's a nest of field batteries in there, but what's going on behind—that's what we have to check up, day by day. Any little change in the back lines, or any unusual activity on their field railroads—even a bunch of cars left longer than usual on

a siding indicates something. Got to check it all up, Corporal, day to day, even hour to hour, so that our general staff can assemble all the data from all our observers and make a good guess just where and what the Boches may be at. Good job for a fresh air crank up here anyway, isn't it?"

"Little too much, sir!" Jimmy swung his heavy gloves together to restore some warmth to his fingers, smashed his leather cap tighter over his ears, and smiled back at this friendly officer of the O.R.C. who was taking his first training on French soil himself, and had not seen any of the rough, actual service that two years had brought the quiet, non-boastful Corporal back in America.

Then he went to his aerial spying over beyond No Man's Land. The horizons of the wintry brown earth were becoming misty and obscure, and when patches of cloud struck across the sun, Jimmy had hard work in identifying landmarks beyond the German positions that he had already recorded. The first-line trenches were faint little markings visible, now and then, on a slope, and then lost altogether, while the com-

munications leading back came out clearer. Over to the left, two miles away, a lively little shelling was going on from the American side, endeavoring to reach some concealed German batteries over a ridge, but this had become all in the day's work of late, and Jimmy paid no attention to it as it lay entirely in the field of other balloon observers. Jimmy could make out four of the captive gas bags bobbing away behind the Sammies' lines, and once he saw a white shrapnel burst near one of them as the enemy, annoyed at the close ranging in of the American guns on their own batteries, took an occasional poke at the spotters in the air.

So far the Germans had not bothered Jimmy's balloon, as it had no part in the range-finding for the Yankee artillery. He and Lieutenant Cook were just keeping tab on a stretch where a German military railway could be watched five miles distant, and they had to discover and report any activity along this exposed place. The American guns had already hammered it a bit this week, and the Fritzies had grown cautious with their train schedule.

"Bringing up their stuff in the night, I sup-

pose," commented Lieutenant Cook. "Hello, there's a bunch of cars poking across that valley now, Corporal! Send that down, now—maybe the staff'll want to show 'em that we're not sound asleep on this sector. Say, Corporal, that *is* a real field train moving up!"

Intently they both watched through their glasses. Jimmy could pick out the cut of the little military roadbed—a yellowish streak against the darker earth. On part of the way it had been camouflaged with tree branches and a sort of fencing, but the balloon observers had long since marked this down for the guns.

"Needn't bother about sending range," continued the officer; "all the data for that spot has been worked out, and the artillery has it down fine."

"Hello, there!" cried Jimmy over the wire, after he was once in connection with the headquarters' staff. "Balloon station No. 7, and Lieutenant Cook wishes to report that train movement is taking place behind enemy lines—the little valley, range and target for which is in your hands. He reports quick action, sir, will be necessary, if at all, while they're in the open—"

And all Corporal Jimmy got back was a sort of mutter which he took was the officer below turning to snap some order to another unit of the swiftly moving organization that would control the artillery fire. Indeed, it seemed he had hardly turned back to where his fellow observer was slanting his glasses out over the basket side, when off to his right and rear a bit, there came the muffled roar of a whole battery of the American "four-point sevens."

The salvo burst out and strung along like a pack of angry dogs, and Jimmy saw the gray smoke lift and spread from the concealed emplacement. It was all plain to him here, and then he turned to fling his glasses on the far, faint streak of the railroad cutting. Instantly he caught a burst of black smoke and dirt just this side of the target designation, and then another and another as the high explosive shells searched out their prey.

"Short—a bit short!" yelled the signal officer, and he turned about to seize the telephone that now would be connected directly to the fire control commander: "Looks like two hundred yards elevation would get 'em!"

"Think so, sir! Just about! *Zing!* There's one that lifted dust right about in their right-of-way! The boys are changing the elevation, sir—they're gettin' 'em!"

The officer was about once more, eager to see the fun: "Flopped a big one right ahead of that train, Corporal! There—that's the three-inchers, this time! They're pumping everything in, aren't they?"

Lieutenant Cook, O. R. C., had never been under fire, or he would have noted the quizzical grin which Corporal May turned to him. Jimmy figured that in just about ten minutes the Huns would be so sore at the way the lively Sammies were mashing up their transport that there'd be some hullabaloo at this end of the line also. And the airmen not being active to-day, they would know it was the line of observers in the balloons who were spying out their movements. All over those low ridges and woody hills to the east and north the wily Boches were waiting to break up the constantly increasing offensive of the Sammies' artillery. So far they had been playing at this gun work and a night trench raid now and then.



There came the muffled roar of a whole battery
of the American "four-point sevens."

Jimmy turned quietly to his superior of the O. R. C., who was getting pleasantly excited over the battle they had started. "There they come, sir, poking a gun at us from that nest we marked down yesterday on Hill No. 26. We better send that down, now, also."

So the officer "called down" the battery which had uncovered itself for a target, and presently another American battery spoke up far to the left and Jimmy had the satisfaction of seeing the enemy guns marked up by a black splotch of lifted earth. Then the German fieldpieces began to bark closer in, and in a minute the two observers, knowing that each side had one another pretty well spotted, had nothing to do but watch the long range racket.

"Business picking up, Corporal May!" said the Lieutenant. "See 'em opening up clear down the line? Better than it was day before yesterday when they did mash up one of our gun stations!"

Jimmy's eye was casually following the hazy flight of a shell which he could pick up as it lifted from the German concealment behind the wooded ridge.

"Now," he muttered, "what's the game? They really must be trying to reach our base camp at that elevation!"

For the five-inch shell described a beautiful arc over the American trenches, batteries and all, and exploded high in the air far to the rear.

Jimmy turned and eyed his inexperienced superior officer. He wondered if Lieutenant Cook guessed that the Boches slammed that one over as a feeler for the balloon line two thousand feet above the ground target, the American guns, which they would ordinarily try to locate.

"Sure as shootin' fish in a bucket," murmured Jimmy, "they're going to sprinkle a little shrapnel around this crazy old gas bag!"

He watched the black smears where the German shells were falling back of the Sammies' first lines, crowding in closer and closer to the gun locations. Then a sharp, jarring explosion came right ahead in mid-air!

Lieutenant Cook turned quickly and they both stared at the white, spreading cloud seemingly so deadly near to them. But not a sound of the spraying shrapnel reached their ears.

"Sir, they're chalking us up! They timed that

one pretty near right, but altogether too low. Kind of bad business, sir!"

Jimmy didn't feel like suggesting that they signal to be lowered. Or the windlass men could give them another five hundred feet of cable. With all his nervy resourcefulness Corporal May of the Regulars was cautious enough when caution was the thing. It was no manner of use to hang on up here now. The guns knew their range and targets, and the air up here was chilly anyway.

"Maybe they'll bang away 'til dark," growled Jimmy, "and——"

He saw and heard the explosion of two shells almost below them and in the foreground—straight on the American front trenches. The reverberation of the artillery fusillade came from both sides now and far down the line, as if every one was getting tired of the inaction all day. Jimmy knew that he was getting a beautiful bird's-eye view of a real artillery duel now, but he wasn't going to let this O. R. C. lieutenant know it was his first. So he quietly watched the racket below and then off to the German target designations which now were getting hazy in

the dust and distance. But out of that thickening area was coming the deadly scatter of shrapnel and high explosive shells with which the irritated Boches were trying to quiet the watchful Sammies who had interfered with their transport road.

Again and again Jimmy saw the jets of black dirt rise among the American trenches, and he grew quite sorry for the fellows who must be hunting holes down there from the bombardment. And then came a sensation as if a current of air had billowed up to tug heavily on the basket, and the balloon went dodging off sideways under the impact.

"My-O!" yelled Jimmy, trying to steady himself against this maddening spin, "that was a good one, sir! Good thing that it was under us instead of above or we'd have been picking shrapnel out of our hides for a month—not forgetting a first-class tumble down to home folks!"

He looked down at the dizzy space to the irregular lines of trenches. Tiny figures showed here and there, and Jimmy imagined that they were staring up to see what had happened to the aeronauts. He saw the squad of Signal Corps

men around the windlass station suddenly stare off over the trenches and then, as he tried to fix the glasses more clearly on them, they suddenly broke and ran in all directions.

The next instant the whole bit of ground around the machinery was blotted out by a jet of brown earth.

"A hit!" gasped Jimmy, "square as could be!"

"Yes," retorted the Lieutenant, "and the telephone's gone."

He threw down the useless headgear, and turned to Corporal May, who had suddenly jumped to the basket's side and looked down again. The big cylindrical bag had made a slow heave off in the tugging wind. Jimmy took one long glance and then turned quietly to his superior.

"So is everything else, sir! The balloon is loose, runing amuck, and we're going skyward about as fast as we can!"

The Lieutenant stared. They saw the long cable sway and drag out of the dust cloud behind the trenches. It was flying on over the communication lines, on and on to the firing front—

then on out over No Man's Land—straight for the German works!

A single high-angle, indirect shot had blown the anchorage free, and they both knew what it meant. The Lieutenant reached for the escape valve which would keep the balloon from rising too high and fast. But Corporal May instantly knew that was useless. They would be over the German lines or at least in deadly rifle range long ere they could bring the bag near the ground.

"Won't do, sir! The parachutes—got to use 'em, and quick!"

"That's so!" The officer crouched about staring at Jimmy. "Did you ever use those contrivances, Corporal? I didn't!"

"No, sir. But they are here, one on either side, and ready to use. We had practice in cutting 'em loose this week, but a two-thousand-foot jump—Oh, Glory—no!"

"The higher, the safer!" Lieutenant Cook was rapidly working at the lashings which held the carefully arranged parachute to the basket guys. The observers knew that the strong, silken contrivances were inspected at every as-

cent and there was hardly a chance of failure. But for inexperienced men it was a nerve-testing dilemma.

"Hurry, sir," shouted Jimmy; "seems like we're traveling seventy miles an hour on this wind! Swing out in your seat and I'll handle your lines! You'll make it just outside our barbed wires, I think, but cut loose, quick!"

The officer swung out and dropped in the ringed seat of the parachute, but he turned a pale, doubtful face to his comrade. "All right—but follow me at once, Corporal, and careful with your start."

And then, plunging like a dead weight for the distant earth, Jimmy saw the parachute go free. So intent was he in some desperate fear that it would not open that he did not realize that the balloon shot on upward swiftly under the release of the officer's weight. Then Jimmy saw the parachute slowly unfold and then snap out, looking to him above like a yellow pumpkin fixed in mid-air.

Then Corporal May turned swiftly to unloose his own parachute from its bindings. It was only the work of seconds, but he started in dismay

when he saw that he was drifting now far to the east towards a distant line of hills, and that a scud of mist hid the earth directly beneath him. Over the enemy lines it lay like a white blanket thinning here and there, but not allowing him to distinguish any familiar object. The rolling reverberations of the artillery battle came up clear and menacing, but so confusing that for a moment Jimmy lost his sense of location.

He discovered himself staring wildly at his own lines thinking they were the Germans'. Everything looked unfamiliar in the distorting fog. Something had whipped into the parachute lashings and he tore off his glove and worked desperately in the bitter cold, muttering to himself.

"Got to be out of this!" Then he stopped and stared again. The grim, hard fact faced him that he was surely going to end his military career in a German prison camp. He thought of Robbie McClane, the Canadian corporal, to whose father he had smilingly promised he would look for his son some day in Germany. That was a fine joke now! And for once Jimmy's alert presence of mind deserted him. He couldn't decide

whether to jump and take a chance down in that uncertain mist bank or wait a few minutes and see where he was traveling. Beyond the American sector began the lines of the French allies, and perhaps if he was bearing easterly he might descend into them.

"Then I might not, too!" muttered Jimmy. He sat back on his heels grasping the parachute lashings and stared out. He knew from the easy motion of the balloon that it was traveling fast and steadily on with the wind. It was much pleasanter than riding on the anchor as far as a joy ride was concerned—but it was that finish, reflected Jimmy, that might not be so lovely.

Through the thin, reeling mists he saw darker patches that must be woods, then the contour of an unfamiliar hill, and then a silvery twist that must be water.

"River!" gasped Jimmy. "Now that's news to me! Must be streaking it for Lorraine, or straight on to Berlin itself!"

He tried to remember just how long the observation balloon would keep its buoyancy; he felt that with the threatening weather it would be perilous to remain aloft under any circum-

stances, and with night coming on he would have to jump soon anyway.

"Take a chance, man!" he muttered; "one time's as *bad* as another."

So with another anxious survey of the round, foggy aspect of the earth, he made the last stays loose on the parachute, took one careful look at the creaking guys above the basket and climbed over to settle in the canvas-bottomed ring. And once outside the basket Jimmy was fairly scared. It struck him how he was hanging a half mile above the ground trusting to that flimsy arrangement of cord and cloth. His fingers were numbing and he didn't dare think of the chances any longer. So he settled back, freed the check cord, and then felt his breath suddenly leave him.

He had gone like a rocket before he was ready, it seemed. The air rushed up terrifically, tearing at his clothes as he hung to the stays. The parachute was a streak of dark above him and Jimmy felt despairingly that it never would open. Then it fluttered out one side, spun a moment and with a snap like a great whip the umbrella top flew wide.

Jimmy felt his wild plunge check slowly, then

he dived off on the gale, swung back and began to drop steadily through the curtain of fog. He swung his forehead against his arm, for he felt he was actually perspiring—Corporal Jimmy of the Regulars was scared badly—scared worse than he ever had been. He would have given everything he possessed to be back on good solid ground.

Watching past his seat he saw the outlines of the earth grow plainer, and then he went into a thick, drifting cloud. And when he came out of this he started with dismay to discover the ground so close, rising up like a brown, wavering blanket to meet him. He saw faint tree tops, and then the branches—woods everywhere in the damp mist. And another moment he was whirling down straight on them. He drew up his legs, shrinking from the impact, for he imagined he was dropping much faster than he really was. Almost before he had time to dodge, he saw a gaunt tree top heave up past him, and then the edge of the parachute cracked into another branch, broke through, flopping Jimmy wildly into some evergreen limbs, broke again, and let him go with a hard crash into more yielding

branches. He covered his face with one hand and grasped at the evergreen foliage. Then he rolled over and discovered himself on his stomach, staring down at real, leafy earth twenty feet below.

He got his wind presently, but he didn't move, so startling was this change from the white world above. Then he heaved a sigh of thankfulness. He was down anyhow to whatever adventure befell him.

But for some moments Jimmy tiredly didn't want to move. The sting of hitting into this mass of evergreen seemed to have warmed him, and besides he wanted to think. If he only knew how far he had drifted, and where the lines were! Finally he got his pocket compass out and roughly computed that he must have gone fifteen miles and in an easterly trend along the front of the opposing armies. The artillery was growling away slowly in the dusk, and Corporal May decided to move. He swung down the limbs stiffly, straddled to the ground, looked about in the fog and then discovered something that made him tense with watchfulness. A rough stick ladder led up another tree not ten yards away and in this tree top was a lookout post. But what got Jim-

my's gaze was a little limb and canvas shelter hut at the foot of the tree and under that was a figure huddled in a blanket. A big pair of German hobnailed boots protruded, and a good-sized German snore arose on the silence.

"Well," muttered Corporal May, "no doubt of where I am anyhow!"

Slowly, alertly, he crept to the hut. The fellow lay in some dirty straw, a young, stupid-appearing, peasant boy whose little round cap with the designation mark of a Bavarian corps lay by his hand. A telephone box was against the tree and on it hung a courier's leather sack. The fellow was apparently off duty but waiting for some one. The tree top observation post was of no use in this weather at all. But Jimmy decided that he could use the German boy's cap. He had to run their lines somehow or go over the Rhine a prisoner, and a Bavarian headpiece might help. So he drew the cap away, tucked his own under his shirt, and then he unslung the courier's sack and hung it over his shoulder.

"Camouflage, for sure," breathed Jimmy, "and just to delay any alarm, we'll break that telephone connection."

After that Corporal May backed cautiously off and walked briskly down a road that entered a silent, fog-filled, little valley. The compass bearings took him southeast and the road led that way also. He made up his mind he would walk boldly on until he found reason for caution. He might make any patrol encountered think he was on business. And sure enough within five hundred yards he made out a log hut off the roadside with dim figures of men by a smoky little fire.

Taking a good, important stride, Jimmy went straight on along the road. He heard their voices, and saw one who appeared to be on sentry duty, but this fellow merely watched the courier pass until the fog swallowed him up. Then Jimmy May let out a breath of relief.

"Close work!" He trudged on, keeping a wary eye out to the roadside. And presently he was sure this little valley opened out to a wider space. He found great shell-holes in the road and shattered trees, and then a dead horse. Selecting a good shell-hole, Jimmy sat down to do a little reasoning in military engineering.

"This road descends a slope that is under di-

rect fire, that's plain. And so the Germans didn't run their first-line trenches across it. They could defend it with machine gun redoubts from each slope on the sides much easier. They just let the French bang away at the road, but no infantry attack could reach it. Plain as day! Well, then I'll stick to the road and sneak if they happen to have a patrol out."

So silently, waching in the fog, he crept from shell-hole to shell-hole. He struck boggy ground. The frowning hills on each side the pass in the rear disappeared in the fog. He felt sure he was past the first line of defenses. And he had heard that this sector was but thinly held just now. But there ought to be a sentry out on the road at least. And half a mile out on the boggy flat Jimmy suddenly squatted down in a shell-hole, silent as the clods.

There was the road outpost! He came sauntering along through the mud and passed Corporal May who lay flat on his face in a hole not ten feet distant. Then the sentry stopped, leaned on his gun and waited in the dripping fog. Jimmy lay like a stone, trying to breathe without moving his back muscles. And when he heard

that sentry splash slowly on he lifted an eye and watched.

"Close work!" he whispered again and got to his feet, kicked off some of the clinging soil of France and sped on with a glance at his compass. He was traveling southeasterly all right again, and somewhere he knew the Armies of France, Great Britain and the good old U. S. A. were barring his path so he couldn't miss 'em!

And a half mile out on that foggy plain when he had begun to watch closely for trench or outpost, ready to sing out lest some over vigilant sniper shoot him, Jimmy was challenged sharply.

"All right!" yelled Jimmy. "Friend, Frenchy! Me—big as a house!"

And he hastily jerked off that Bavarian cap to thrust it into the courier's sack. Then he started: "Say, maybe I got the whole war plan of the Kaiser's general staff here."

And when the big, bearded *poilu* reached Corporal Jimmy May with another sharp hail, and then saw it was a Sammie busily rummaging in the Kaiser's mail pouch, he laughed wonderingly.

Jimmy was holding up a pair of gray socks and a big porcelain pipe.

"And did I spend the whole afternoon just to steal that!" he murmured. "Wish I could send the pipe back to the kid from Bavaria."

The outpost guard came closer, still keeping his bayonet alertly at the challenge, but grinning at the American who had appeared out of German land with his loot.

"Arretez! Mon Ami!"

"Fine," retorted Jimmy, "whatever it is."

Then he dug down in his shirt for his grimy little phrase-book while the guard watched him rubbing the dog-eared pages. Jimmy never seemed able to memorize his French at all.

"Ha! Now, listen—" he said, "*jay pair-doo le shem-mang!* Get that—I've lost my *shem-mang! Parley-voo* me back to where I belong. Frenchie, I'll give you the Kaiser's socks, if you show me *le droit shemmang.*"

"Oui, monsieur."

The outpost pointed politely back the road. Jimmy May set off and his escort followed until he turned the wanderer over to a sergeant at a cross-roads hut. Then Jimmy was taken to an officer who spoke English and who listened incredulously to his story. But there was the

Kaiser's military mail pouch and the pipe. The last he saw of the German socks they were sticking out of the tunic of the grinning guard who couldn't get his French talk. But Jimmy didn't care; when they finally let him swing up on a big motor truck and sent him back to the American lines with an explanation, he was too tired to bother about anything. But the next day when his companion of the parachute descent hunted him up to hear the rest of the adventure, Corporal May presented the porcelain pipe to Lieutenant Cook. He himself didn't smoke, anyhow.

CHAPTER VI

BUNKER HOLE

AND now if Monsieur le Corporal will apply his eye to the end of the periscope," the smiling *poilu* continued, "he will see what has excited our curiosity for the last hour. Look very carefully, the sun is almost gone on that rough ground, but perhaps—well, what is it, my friend?"

Safe in the deep trench over which a slow but deadly, grazing fire from the German snipers made direct observation difficult, Corporal May steadied his eyes before the clear mirrors that reflected the brown and dismal expanse of No Man's Land. At first that was all he could discover—shell-torn heaps and depressions, and the dim contour of hills and ragged trees beyond the enemy's hidden positions.

"A little to the left of a direct line from this post," went on the young, brown-bearded Frenchman, "you will see the top of the British

tank wallowed down in the big shell crater where they had to leave it this morning. Hardly visible, is it not?"

"I got it," retorted Corporal Jimmy eagerly; "yes, it's almost flat with the ground level, but—I see!—something white is moving, a bit towards our side!"

"Good eyes!" cried the French rifle grenadier. "Some one has lived there then through the gas, and signals us. All day we have kept the big crater under close observation, thinking the Boches would try to occupy it and capture the tank. But this is the first sign of life there. We have reported it to our captain, and to the English engineers. Of the eight men of the tank, driven out this morning by the gas, after our attack failed, three are missing, the British officers report. Suppose, Monsieur le Corporal, one poor fellow lived, kicking around helpless in that steel box?"

"He sure couldn't get back now if he were able," said Jimmy, "but suppose also the Germans had managed to reach the tank, and this signal was a trick?"

"Our officers have discussed that and it may be

so. There is only one way to decide, and I volunteered for it."

Jimmy stared at the short, sturdy young Frenchman who sat smilingly down on the narrow platform of the firing pit. On either side, a yard away, other soldiers were standing to the ready rifles which lay out between the sandbags of the parapet, and along the trench others drowsed indifferently while off immediate duty. Here and there among them were soldiers of America, fellows of Jimmy's own battalion, scattered through the French first-line troops of this sector to familiarize themselves with the lay of the land before they took it over. The Sammies had crept cautiously up the communications to-day after the sharp attack which the French had delivered following the advance of the four British armored cars, or "tanks," which had cleaned out a small salient of the German line to the left. But directly in front of this position the raid had been driven back, by enfilading machine gun fire, and the tank on the extreme right had been gas-bombed until the occupants had to leave it and be dragged back, dazed and helpless, by the retiring French infantrymen. The English over to

the left of the sector where the American battalion had been sandwiched in among their French comrades, had been too harassed all day by a concentrated artillery fire to think of the abandoned tank.

"You're going to scout out there?" exclaimed Jimmy. "Well, say—that would be a man's-sized job all right! Sure as anything the Germans will be poking out there, too, after dark!"

"Surely," the grenadier shrugged, "but that is why, my friend, Sammee! There is a wounded Englishman there, and we must be there first."

Jimmy gazed admiringly at Private Charbonnet who spoke English as good as his own. He took off his steel helmet and wiped the sweat that the last rays of a July sun, striking along the hot trench, brought out on his brow. He just couldn't have this smiling Frenchie discussing so dangerous an undertaking with such calm and clear lightness of mind.

"Who's going with you?" Jimmy burst out suddenly.

"No one. Not for the first scout. It will be highly dangerous ground, each side looking for

something to happen, you see, in regard to the British tank!"

"Oh, I see!" retorted Jimmy. "Well, now, I think—" then he caught sight of his senior captain crowding slowly along past the trench defenders.

Suddenly Jimmy turned from the firing station and elbowed his way back until he stopped before Captain Banion at the turn of the traverse. The officer was making a silent inspection, and, with a glance along at the silent khaki-clad figures among the men in the French horizon blue, he was turning back from the firing trench.

"Sir!" Jimmy almost touched his sleeve to detain him.

"Squad all posted for this stand-to, sir?" queried Captain Banion. "Everything all right, Corporal, up here?"

"With us—yes, sir! Fine as can be! But out there—" Jimmy waved his hand up to the parapet, "a fellow's out there, they say. Some one from that busted-down tank, sir, they think. And the French are going to send a one man patrol out to see. Right up near the German line, sir, and a little, sawed-off Frenchman with whiskers

is going to crawl it, and he smiles like it was all sorts of a lark to tackle it!"

"Ah, I imagine. Just like 'em." The big captain smiled, himself, at Corporal Jimmy. "And I suppose it'll raise a racket here to-night and you boys'll get a taste. I hope the Frenchman brings back his chap all right."

"Yes, but—Captain! Hate to have 'em tackle it, and us—sticking safe in this ditch! If getting this blamed Britisher back from his hole starts any fireworks, we ought to be in it. Just for—do you know what to-day is, sir?"

"To-day, sir?" The senior captain turned wonderingly.

"It's the *night before* the Fourth of July!" retorted Jimmy, eagerly. "A hundred and forty-two years ago we Yankees started a little fireworks of our own against the British, didn't we, sir? And along came the Frenchies and gave us a boost! Now, here's a chance for a Frenchie and me to go out tackling the British again—only to lug one of 'em in out of a bad hole, sir. You see how I feel about it, sir?"

Captain Banion stared silently. Then he rubbed his chin. He had been Jimmy's second

lieutenant back in Mexican border days, and he knew Jimmy as a father knows his eldest born. Then he smiled.

"Is that how you feel, Corporal? Exactly so. Hands across the sea, eh? Report to me at eight o'clock—I'll ask permission for you from the major just that way—and it might tickle the fancy of the English engineers down the line as well."

"Thank you, sir!" Jimmy May saluted and turned back to the little pocket of a firing trench which was dug out a little in advance of the main line and isolated so that, if a high explosive dropped into it, the damage would be confined to this squad of defenders alone. The French snipers on watch were laughing and joking; it was just after supper on a calm summer night; and after the little brush with the Boches that morning, though the objective in front had not been immediately gained, they were not downcast. It was part of the slow, persistent war game to hold and drive, defend and attack until, bit by bit, the ground was won from the enemy.

Jimmy found his amiable friend, Monsieur Charbonnet of the Grenadiers, tenderly inspect-

ing his feet under a little dugout and crawled in beside him on the boards.

"Hi, Mister le Frenchman," he smiled, "that little jaunt of yours—I think I'll shag along with you!"

"Eh, my friend?"

"If you and your officers don't object?"

"Not if—" The brown-bearded young Frenchman looked Jimmy over carefully. He seemed satisfied, even pleased.

"I know what you mean! If I'm qualified, eh? Done some scouting myself. Always pulled through, too, if I do say it. Our battalion commander wouldn't let me go out if he didn't think I was right for the job, you know. Going out early?"

"At ten o'clock. I will need you, my friend, for undoubtedly there is a badly wounded man to bring in. I thought you would volunteer, seeing it was dangerous." Monsieur Charbonnet laughed lightly. "You understand I had heard of you—you are the famous corporal of your infantry regiment who refused a lieutenancy, and has been mentioned twice already to your commanding general for gallantry. If America had

a Legion of Honor medal it would be yours, eh?"

"Cheer up," retorted Jimmy; "let's talk business. Any particular preparations?"

"I will take a service pistol and my big trench knife. If we are trapped a rifle would be of little use at best."

"Good! I'll be with you at ten." Jimmy turned back to hunt up his platoon commander and report that he was to present himself in person back at the battalion headquarters in a deep dugout of the communications. But an orderly had already brought notification of Corporal's May's detachment for the night patrol, so Sergeant Milbank merely looked Jimmy over with gruff interest.

"You be back here for the mornin' count, son —that's all. It'll be the Glorious Fourth, and not Merry Christmas—y' understand?"

"Sure!" laughed Jimmy, "that's why I'm going!"

It was a few minutes before ten when Corporal May groped his way along the silent communication passage from B Company's rest station to the front trenches. The stars just made

light enough to see the forms of sleeping men over which he stepped on the boarding and then crowded past the sentries every few yards on their raised spaces where they could command the fire zone out to the barbed wire. A strange quiet reigned after the lively sniping duels of the afternoon, and the artillery battle of the morning. Here and there a rifle cracked, and off to the west the big guns rumbled slowly. But just here, although hundreds of men lay in appointed stations straining their eyes through the dark for the approach of the foe on either side, nothing broke the calm of the July night.

Private Charbonnet whispered greeting to his American friend when they met in the advanced fire trench. The young Frenchman had been a shipping clerk in an English exporting house before the war, and knew the language as well as Corporal May. Leaning across the parapet he whispered his plans for the adventure. They were simple enough. Once past their own wires the two scouts would merely creep and steal silently as possible out to the great shell crater in which the disabled tank was sunk. There they would lie and observe for some time, and when

satisfied that no enemy was about, they would search for the supposed wounded Englishman. If any mishap befell either of the two the survivor was to make his way back and report the affair.

So, with a "good-bye and good luck" from his old bunky, Eddie Perkins, who came down the line to see him off, Jimmy May slipped over the sandbags and walked stealthily after the agile Frenchman. Once outside the wire defenses and fifty yards on, Charbonnet signaled Jimmy to lie down. Carefully they studied the quiet dark. The tank lay a thousand feet ahead and to the left, much nearer the German lines than the French. That was why, when the scouts had made the most definite calculation possible of its exact location, they had to crawl the last hundred yards with the silence of a fox.

To miss the big crater meant stumbling upon the enemy's line even if he had no patrols out in front as was probable. They must get the lone Britisher away as secretly as they came.

Jimmy crawled two paces to the left of his friend. When a listening pause was made, Charbonnet would kick the American gently on the

arm. Then they would lie with chins in the dirt, still as the shell-torn clods. At last the Frenchman crept directly across Jimmy's path to the left, stopping him. Mouth to ear he whispered:

"We must be far enough. Now to make way parallel to the German line and find the spot. The stillness is strange, is it not? A star bomb now would surely betray us, we are on too high land."

Jimmy nodded. He feared they were too far past the line where the tank must be. They knew by the many small craters that they were close in the area where the barrage had smashed at the German first line. So now they crept on through the dark slightly away and to the left; and presently Charbonnet crouched back on his friend. Silently he thrust an arm past Jimmy's nose. Staring ahead the Corporal made it out now. A depression in the earth where one of the tremendous high-explosive shells had mined it out, and there lay a dim, straight line, a mere darker spot under the stars.

Charbonnet crawled to the edge of the crater, and Jimmy reached it a yard distant. Then they watched incessantly, ears strained also against

the slightest sound. The German trenches must be not seventy yards beyond this hole. And presently Jimmy's alert ear picked up a noise, it seemed a mere scratching, then muffled taps. They came from the disabled steel monster down in the hole.

After a moment the Frenchman nudged Jimmy's leg and pulled himself over the huge, hard clods down in the crater. Corporal May followed to find his friend on his knees, a hand upraised to the broad, corrugated "crawl" of the caterpillar tractor. Between this belted foot of the big tank and the one on the other side lay the two spiked wheels with the chains leading through the armor by which the thing was steered. To one of these chains hung a white handkerchief. The "stern" of the land battleship lay pointing back to the Allied line so that the signal would not be observed by the enemy.

Jimmy had never seen one of the tanks before, so he lay under the steering gear while his comrade uprose by the square, open door, looked in long and cautiously, and then tapped. When Corporal May uprose to join him the Frenchman laughed silently. He extended a hand within

the steel threshold and waved it slowly, tapping the wall.

They didn't want either to be shot for a Boche, or to alarm the lone defender. For there was no disabled Englishman in the big armored tractor. Instead, by the dimmest sort of light from a fast-dying pocket light they saw a grimy, greasy, khaki-clad figure bending over a section of the corrugated belt tread, heaving mightily on a short crowbar and then stopping to get his breath.

"Tap-tap-tap!" went Monsieur Charbonnet's finger nails on the steel. The figure within turned slowly, then whirled to seize a rifle.

"Hold, there!" whispered Jimmy. "Friends, man!"

The man stopped. "Strike me dead," he whispered, "but you were a long time comin'!"

The rescuers were slipping through the aperture. It was too dark to see more than the steel beams and braces of the armored roof and sides, and the heavy motor centered over the truck frame. But in a bulging sponson on either side was a machine-gun; and in the fore part of the tank were the steering seat and wheel and the slits for the lookouts and riflemen. There were

gas tanks of steel, and protected ammunition magazines along the tractor frame; and on each side the heavy, grease-covered gears of the twenty-four-inch caterpillar treads that ran along the ground and back over the outside of the armor overhead and forward, so that the monster moved on by laying its own track, yard by yard, under its projecting front.

But Jimmy had neither the time nor the illumination to study the tank's interior. The soldier mechanic was wiping the grease off his hands and grasping Jimmy's own.

"W'y it's a bloomin' Sammy! Wot you doin' here, mate?"

"Come to get you back," whispered Jimmy. "Thought you were wounded."

"Wounded, me eye! I wanted 'elp to pull this old elephant out o' 'ere! 'Ung that signal rag out there for my mates to crawl out and give me a 'and!"

The soldier of France and the soldier of America gazed speechlessly at this artless and aggrieved soldier of Old England.

" 'Elp!" continued the latter. "I get this old girl goin', and it'll be Fritzie that yells for 'elp!

I'm sore at 'em, I am! Slung dirty gas pots at me all mornin', but they don't fancy comin' over the top to tyke me, no they don't!"

"They'll come to-night, Monsieur Tommee!" gasped Private Charbonnet; "that's why we have come out to you!"

"Didn't they most croak you this morning with the gas?" whispered Corporal Jimmy.

"They did fluster us a bit. The bloomin' stuff got up in our car and 'ung there. So we 'ad to abandon ship, maties—the officer and the two gunners and the driver and me. The mechanic, 'e was killed by a bullet kickin' in past a gun shield, and the two 'elpers were hurt. We crawled out and lay sobbin' in our masks, and the infantry took 'em all back but me. W'en the gas lifted out of the 'ole a bit, the Fritzies were slappin' a 'ot fire down back o' me so I tykes one look back at the lines and I says: 'It's better up in our old iron kettle, it is,' so I crawls back in. The gas it thins out, and then I sees this old girl is all right except a chunk of 'igh explosive shell landed up in her tractor belt. I digs it out and now I'm slidin' the belt back on the drive gear. Then, if I 'ad a bloke to steer

her I'd drive the old girl up out o' this 'ole and do a parade up and down between the lines to show 'em!"

"You're crazy with the heat!" remarked Jimmy. "Now let's make a crawl back out of here before the Fritzies——"

"Two machine-guns and a stack o' rifles and a case of hand bombs," retorted the tank defender. "Fritzie'll have a time tykin' us!"

"But, my friend!" put in Private Charbonnet. "It is orders to return at once. With you, or any one found out here!"

"My orders was from the Thirtieth Battalion, Royal Engineers," answered the Tommy, "and my nyme is Bill Frost—temporarily givin' 'is own orders to 'imself. But, matey, you make the crawl back and report for me—Major Archer, over in our section—sayin' Bill Frost, 'e needs a driver for this old bus and then 'e'll come 'ome 'imself!"

Corporal Jimmy May was laughing silently in spite of himself. The dirty, oil-spattered Tommy was grinning too. The French Grenadier shrugged, then he, too, smiled.

"Well, then, it is so! The English they are

stubborn as the American mules! I shall go back —my commandant will report to the English headquarters. *Voila!* That is all can be done. The English will have to get you out!"

"You said it, Frenchy! Much obliged, but you say Bill Frost is still 'ere with 'is car. Still—now, what's that?"

They heard nothing. Jimmy stole to the door above the steering chains. He saw nothing save the stars and dark. But some one had to report back at once. Jimmy had no orders except to follow the experienced French patrol. But as Private Charbonnet was cautiously lifting a leg to slip out and down to the ground, Jimmy bent to whisper.

"I'll stick along with this chap. Report to my sergeant. If I don't get out it's only one gone—and I can't leave a chap like this."

Out on the ground Private Charbonnet of the Grenadiers made a silent and grand flourish. He even bowed to Corporal May of the American Infantry.

"It is understood, my comrade. Comrades all —the three of us! And there will be some stirring to rescue you before dawn. Adieu!"

Jimmy saw him slip to the edge of the crater, his figure against the starlight for a moment, then he dropped for the long crawl back.

Bill Frost came stealthily past the motors, covering his light.

"Matey, you goin' to stick by me?"

"Sure! What did you think I'd do?"

They grasped hands silently in the darkness.

"First one o' the Sammies I laid eyes on," muttered Bill Frost, "if they're all like you—Oh, well!"

"But, Bill, you ain't going to try and run this machine out of here? If you start the motors you'll have the Boches swarming up and after us in a minute."

"And our lines'll start a fire on 'em that'll make 'em 'unt their 'oles again, too. No, the 'Uns'll sneak us if they do anything."

Jimmy reflected. That was true.

"Come, now," whispered Bill, "I been mufflin' my tools with rags to fix this belt, and now with you to 'elp, I can put this old box ready to run, or fight, or waltz, just as I get orders from the Royal Engineers."

He had been struggling all afternoon to hook

up the great heavy chains that connected the right-hand tread; but now, while Jimmy pried the links tight, the mechanic soldier had it done in ten minutes.

Then they slipped back in the dark, sat on the frame by one of the machine-gun stations, and Bill reached out a tin of bully beef to Jimmy.

"Now we're ready, matey. The Fritzies ought to know we're 'ere if their lookouts ain't stone deaf. Maybe they think there's only some poor kickin', gaspin' lads in 'ere that been gassed all day, and so they ain't goin' to trouble the tank 'til they come on in force and counter attack the lines. Maybe—hist!"

Jimmy knelt before the machine-gun shield, his ear to the space about the weapon. Long he listened but only the gentle stir of the night wind came. Bill Frost was forward at the lookout slits where the driver was wont to control the steel monster. And for an hour or more they watched unceasingly. It was the quietest night that Jimmy had seen since the Americans had come to take this sector from the French defenders. Uncannily quiet along this mile. Once or twice a flare came from the German side off to

the left, and usually a languid rattle of snipers' rifles followed, but nothing happened to bring on a real fire exchange.

Bill came back after awhile. He thought it was time some support came from his detachment who had the tanks in charge. It was two o'clock now, and something should be doing. At least a courier might creep forward with orders for him. But from neither line did friend or foe move out across the deadly zone of death to the steel leviathan crouched in its nest.

"It's monotonous a bit," grumbled Bill Frost. "Daylight'll be comin', and then we're in for another day of it, for the snipers'll let nobody over the top one way or other. Day?—it looks like it was comin' now, matey!"

"Day?" echoed Jimmy May. "Say, Bill, do you know what day this is? This is the Big Day!"

"It'll be Big Day if the Fritzies drop a 'igh explosive shell on this bloomin' roof over us. That's all I'm afraid of."

"No." Jimmy shook his friend's shoulder. "Bill, a hundred and forty-two years ago, instead of eating bully beef with you, I'd have been

slammin' you over the head with this monkey wrench!"

"Not if I saw you first, Sammy. Wot for would you be slammin' a mate over the 'ead?"

"Mate? We were starting in to clean up you Britishers in jig time! Bill, to-day is the Fourth of July!"

Bill stared. Then he snapped on his pocket flash and looked carefully in Jimmy's face. Then he shut off the light and muttered:

"Strike me dizzy, if it ain't! Fourth o' July! And 'ere's you and me fightin' side by each for to make the world safe and sound again, when the kings, they muddle it up! I say, that old King George the Third, we 'ad then, 'e was a 'Un 'imself! And if the Frenchies 'adn't come to 'elp you Yankees 'e'd have licked you, and England would a 'ad more land but less sense."

"Oh—maybe!" retorted Jimmy, "maybe not. Maybe you would—maybe not. We had a George of our own, who was some George——"

"And 'ere's a go. W'y this 'ere old iron box that's shelterin' you is named King George III. A bloke of the Lancashires 'e painted it on the frame thinkin' it was gyme to send a 'Anover

king to pot-hunt the Fritzies! And 'ere's a bloomin' Yankee 'e comes crawlin' up to get be'ind old George—on the Fourth of July!"

"Good-night!" whooped Jimmy, "I'm going home!"

"Don't yell so loud—maybe a 'Anover 'Un'll 'ear you. Oh, this is rich, Sammy! 'Ere's me and you and old George the Third——"

"Change the name of the old tank or I beat it, Bill. I say——"

Corporal May stopped abruptly, for faintly on the night breeze he had heard a mutter. Bill had heard it, too; he was back at his lookout, and the Sammy and Tommy lay in the dark, service pistols in hand, watching, listening. For a time, nothing. Then Jimmy heard it again, hushed voices, a subdued clatter, then it seemed the movement of bodies out on that rough, seared but invisible ground to his left.

Then a stir came by his side. Bill was shaking him excitedly.

"Over the top, mate! They're comin' sure as shootin'!" Bill slipped to the rear, drew his body up through the steel doorway and listened. They could hear more sounds out on the night

wind. The British soldier dropped back, stealthily closed the opening and came rapidly forward to Corporal May who knelt in the machine-gun sponson.

"Over the top in force! This ain't no patrol come for to look in this tank. It's an attack for the lines, matey! A surprise attack without barrage. They'll open that on our communications w'n our front lines discover the advance. Crawl, creep close as can be, and then rush the trenches!"

"They're passing us, then? Must think there's nobody here!"

"If the attack on the front line goes through they got this ground anyhow," whispered Bill. "But you and me, Sammy—can you work a Lewis gun? Can?—w'y you just got to!"

"Know a little about it—but what——?"

"Right and left—enfilade 'em as they pass. If we don't 'it a man of 'em, anyhow we'll wake up five miles of fightin' men that can!"

"Take that right gun, then!" whispered Jimmy. He was down behind the shield, turning the lever that swung the machine-gun muzzle higher. Sighting out, he saw that it just cleared the level of the ground in the crater of which

the tank was imbedded. "All right!" he whispered, feeling for the feed mechanism and swinging the gun to test the freedom of its arc of fire. "All right, Bill—start it!"

He heard Bill of the Royal Engineers finding his elevation for the gun in the opposite sponson and then, just outside, not fifteen feet away, a gruff mutter of surprise. The German infantry were swinging past, the first ones so near that Jimmy saw them dimly against the starlight, a wave of silent enemies intent on reaching the American and French lines. And he heard Bill again, this time roaring out like a bull:

"Let 'er go! Old King George, and——"

The rest was drowned out in an echoing, snarling clamor as Bill opened the machine-gun out from the right sponson of the tank.

"—And Bunker Hill!" roared Jimmy, and he jumped against the shoulder rest, pressed the trigger and felt the shock of the gun drive back upon him. "Let her go, Bill!"

The next instant pandemonium was in his ears. He had never handled a machine-gun in action and but little in training. He didn't know whether he was swinging the muzzle right on the

waves of German infantry out over that dark No Man's Land, or whether he was hitting the top of the shell crater, or the distant stars, but Corporal May knew he was assisting at the most fearful racket that he ever listened to The roar of the guns, the acrid smoke drifting back, the mechanism getting hotter and hotter to his touch—anyhow he was shooting faster than even Bill, while outside, now, he saw a sudden green, unearthly splotch of light showing up confused and straggling men. And beyond that the whole front lines of the French as far as he could see were breaking out to fire, and the "seventy-fives" of the American artillery back of them were hurling a barrage over and onto the German trenches. The German artillery, now that the trick advance was uncovered and the infantry had to rush back to instant shelter, took up the job, and the battle joined far along the lines each way.

Bill Frost was cooling off his machine barrels, and came dodging around the motor space to yell in Jimmy's ear. The spatter of rifle shots against their steel fortress grew quicker,

steadier, glancing from the top each way, for the fire of both sides would cover it.

"We started something!" yelled Jimmy. "We did——"

"We finished something," yelled Bill. "Broke up their gyme——"

Then there came a crashing explosion just outside the tank, and they felt the shock and rattle of clods on its side.

"Hi!" yelled Bill again, "must be you Yankees bombardin' old King George, the poor old beggar of a 'Anover 'Un! Hi, Sammy, you! You take a run-crawl back to your bloomin' artillery and tell 'em if they let up we'll change the nyme on this bleedin' tank!"

"We'll call it Bunker Hill!" roared Jimmy, "when our outfit gets up here and gets us out, we'll call it Bunker Hill, just in honor of the Fourth of July fireworks!"

"Bunker 'ill?" retorted Bill, "this ain't no 'ill. This is a 'ole. We'll call it Bunker 'Ole."

"Bunker Hole," retorted Jimmy, "that's good —but I'm glad, Tommy, to be over here pulling you out of one instead of trying to put you into one as I would have been compelled to do

a hundred and forty-two years ago if we had met!"

"Ye'r right. 'Ands across the sea, it is! Put 'er there!"

The big Tommy Atkins extended a grimy hand to Jimmy May. They stood up in the first dim dawn of the strangest Fourth of July morning that ever a Yankee boy saw, undoubtedly—this reeking acid-smelling steel box, while the thunder of the guns went on right and left far down the line.

"Some celebration!" yelled Jimmy. "Folks back home haven't any such fireworks as this, Bill!"

"'E 'is plenty," retorted Bill Frost, "and come on, now—let's sneak it before it's more than plenty! Follow me on the crawl, Sammy, from 'ole to 'ole. We'll have to clean the Fritzies out a bit along there before we can rescue ole King George. 'E'll just 'ave to sit 'ere on 'is lone and listen to yer celebration. On, now!"

And it was some crawl the two of them made over the shell-torn No Man's Land back to their front lines. When they finally did worm down between the sandbags and the last *plop* of the

German bullets had dug harmlessly into the dirt around them, Bill Frost stood up and grasped Jimmy May's hand again. Monsieur Charbonnet had hurried up into the fire trench when it was reported that the two adventurers had returned unhurt. He had a tiny American flag which he stuck in the trench wall and then saluted smilingly.

"To your glorious day, Monsieur le Corporal!" he cried.

"Put 'er there!" shouted British Bill. "It's a day we'll all remember, Sammy! We're a bunch of bloomin' pals, now, ain't we?"

CHAPTER VII

BR'ER FRITZIE

CORPORAL JIMMIE GOES OVER THE TOP AT LAST

ON the narrow boarding above the slush and water in the first line trenches Company B crouched against the clay wall and waited for the thunderous barrage of the American artillery to lift before it made its first desperate plunge against the German positions "over the top" and some two hundred yards away. There were grim, hard young faces under the steel helmets, and glancing past his squad down along the olive drab line of crouched backs, Corporal May heard not a word nor saw a lip moving. The big, smashing test was coming this morning, and the Third Battalion knew it; knew, too, that only yesterday, after the Sammies had victoriously swept out and taken the German first line, they had been compelled to fall back before the Boches' counter-attack.

And that had been bad for the new trench

ing there, watch in hand. The officers of the shock battalion knew to a second when the barrage would lift. Then an orderly came jostling along the narrow communication ditch, saluted and spoke to the officer. And piercing the steady roar of the gunfire above came the thin whistle of the "Assembly," for the N.C.O.'s. Corporal May was among the squad leaders who crowded close to the quiet lieutenant who raised his voice sharply to them all.

"The order is now for this platoon to form part of the third wave instead of the first. You know what that means—you are to go squad column, and clean up the first line trench over there after the first and second waves have gone over it. They will rush the German communications, but you fellows will stop in the first trenches and bomb out their dugouts or anything you see left that does not surrender instantly. Maybe the advance will leave a lot of work for you, maybe nothing at all. But you just fall into the trench and clean it out and hold it—hold it for the rest who may be driven back to it by a counter-attack. Now, all plain?"

"Yes, sir!" the non-coms chorused eagerly,

and loosened the bomb-case at his left side. For Corporal Jimmy and Perky were to be the two bombers of the squad file; behind them Tolliver and Jones, the bayoneteers, then Fryer and Casey, two reserve bomb-throwers, and then the two remaining men of Squad Ten with ready rifles—all a well-organized "mopping up party," such as most of the company was organized for, save other squads contained the machine gunners and rifle grenade men. In thin, single squad columns the battalion would go over and walk very deliberately on into that smoke cloud to assault in bombing file, or swing to skirmish line for the bayonet as the case might demand when they reached the German trench. The Boches wouldn't come out, it was expected, after this deluge of fire upon their first line holes all morning, but they would, from every undemolished concrete "pill box" and every sniper's loophole, pour a murderous fire on the first glimpse of the advancing Sammies.

Corporal May glanced back to the first traverse where the communication trench opened onto the advanced line. He saw his loved platoon commander, First Lieutenant Miller, stand-

of the American guns had increased to the nth power—and then, suddenly, it swept down so that the single sharp bursts of the laggard field guns were audible.

"Zero!" gasped Jimmy, and then "Steady, there! Ready!"

For instantly the artillery in the rear broke out in a fiercer volume than ever, lifting a hundred yards beyond with its avalanche of shells. And just as quick the sharp whistle broke, and over the battered sandbags all along the line the first wave of the Sammies scrambled, leaped to their feet and went on. Glancing right and left, Jimmy saw the skirmish line disappearing in the murk. Three minutes more and the second line swept up over the top and followed. Down the line to the left a German shell burst, enveloping a squad in black smoke. Out in the rough No Man's Land the fellows still in the trenches saw motionless figures here and there. The second wave was growing dim in the curling smoke wreaths ahead, and again the barrage lifted and smashed at the Boches further on.

Jimmy's squad was alternately groaning with impatience now, and cheering. The fellows must

have won the first enemy line! Jimmy could see the *liaison* officers back of the second wave signaling to the American lookout posts, for no other means of communication was available now from the attackers to the troops in reserve.

"Ready, there!" repeated Jimmy, his eyes fixed back to the platoon commander. "Now, here goes——"

Lieutenant Miller had thrust both arms up and outward. A series of faint whistles came up and down the line of firing pits. And over the top went Jimmy May instantly with his cry:

"Follow me!"

He knew that the squad column, trained to the exact order, had formed and was behind him. To right and left he saw the other thin files slowly slide up and advance. The platoon officers were between, here and there, and onward went the third wave across the shell-torn soil. The barrage was descending far ahead now where the shock battalions were past the German first line and in bayonet formation, striving to attack the retreating Boches. For when the third wave reached the disordered trenches, past and through the destroyed barbed wires, it seemed there was

little to do. Jimmy had a sense of disappointment when he stood by Lieutenant Miller's side just on the German parapet as the officer shouted for the bombers to close up. The trench was deserted, save for scattered dead and wounded, and a few scared groups of Germans already surrendered and passed by the charging Sammies ahead.

Lieutenant Miller was pointing down the trench.

"In with you, boys! Follow the communications, and scout out every opening, cave and bomb proof! We can't leave any nest of 'em behind to tear into our rear with machine-guns! It's your work to see to that! Take that traverse, Corporal May!"

Jimmy saw that the other squads, each instructed to its work ere it ever left the American side, were hastily tearing down the sandbag parapets and erecting them on the parados across the German trench. The ragged ditch was full of sweating fellows with shovels, picks, bags, transforming the trench so that, if the assault troops were driven back, they could hold the German first line against the counter-attack.

But Corporal May's squad was formed for other work and more exciting. Stumbling on along the trench he reached the traverse which marked the turn of this ditch to the irregular communication trench rearward. Eddie Perkins was right behind him, the conical, corrugated, hand-bomb held ready for Jimmy's signal. But dodging around the traverse, Jimmy found nothing but a single dirty German soldier sitting by a wounded man and holding up his hand.

"Kamarad!" he muttered sullenly, and Jimmy pointed back the way his squad had come. The prisoner dodged past the yelling file which followed close at the Corporal's heels down the zigzagging ditch, knowing that the supporting squads would follow the bombing party. They could hear the uproar of an infantry battle somewhere above and to their left, and the thunder of the barrage drowned Jimmy's voice when he halted. He thrust up one hand when he reached the second traverse, for he had caught sight of a gray-green arm and a bayonet flash around the dirt wall. The Boches were going to hold this point, were they?

Then he heard a warning yell from Tolliver,

the tall bayonet expert of the squad, in the rear of the file. Up over the dirt wall a dull little object had hurtled. And back dashed Jimmy's squad, throwing themselves close against the muddy trench bottom. The next instant the whole trench end by the traverse was a blur of dirt and smoke, and a hail of clods and sticks showered over the Sammies hugging the wall. The Boche bomb had fallen short and harmless. And Jimmy May was up on his feet instantly, with Private Perkins at his side. They dashed into the smoke-filled end of the ditch.

"Let 'er go!" yelled Corporal Jimmy, and slowly, with the long methodical heave of the trained bomb-thrower, the time-gauge set as it left his hand, he pitched the wicked little cone up over the dirt barricade. The dull explosion came instantly. Behind Jimmy, Perkins had swung a bomb up in a slow, high arc to fall directly down over the same spot. And another crash came beyond the traverse. Then, past the two bomb-throwers, crowded the two bayonet men whose duty it was to rush the traverse ere the enemy could recover from the explosions. When Corporal Jimmy came panting around

the dirt wall he saw Tolliver far ahead in the murky trench. There was not a German anywhere.

Each way from the turn of the traverse Jimmy glanced. Back along the way the squad had charged he saw other Sammies pouring, with Lieutenant Miller at their head, quick to support the bomb attack. Ahead, along the communication trench to the next zigzag where another traverse shut off the view, Jimmy saw nothing save deserted equipment, arms and disordered sandbags. Then suddenly he heard the spiteful snarl of bullets past his head, and Fryer, one of his bomb carriers, collapsed to the trench floor. The next instant big Casey staggered to the traverse wall and sank down.

"Got me—shoulder!" he gasped. "Look out there—they're rakin' this ditch!"

"Down—there!" yelled Jimmy. "Every man of you—down!"

They were flat on their stomachs in the trench while over their heads went the *zing-zing* of a steady fusillade, and the dull spatter of bullets in the dirt wall showered stinging bits of sand upon them.

"Machine-gun," muttered Perkins, "and an enfilade fire right down the trench! We might have expected it!"

He crawled forward and dragged the unconscious Fryer back to the shelter of the traverse. Casey crept back himself, and Jimmy hastily applied the soldier's first aid to the big Irishman's shattered upper arm.

"They got us in a fine pocket!" growled wounded Casey. "Go back, Jimmy? Why, we can't—look behind you!"

Corporal May glanced back to where he had thought the supporting platoon must be. They had retreated behind the next turn of the trench, and here and there a motionless figure lay. And Jimmy was wondering at that when, almost by his ear it seemed, he heard the staccato barking of a machine-gun now audible above the crash of the barrage overhead. The section behind them was cleaned up also by an enfilade fire—and this must come from a point in the traverse wall right by the squad's shelter!

Corporal May stared. Another one of his squad was struck in the thigh by a ricocheting bullet from the further traverse. Three men

wounded and disabled, and his other five abandoned in this German trench, hugging the point of dirt and crouching close to the wall with a rain of machine-gun fire over their heads! It was a new problem and a desperate one for Corporal May. He knew that if the first assault troops were driven back he and his men would be cut off and killed or captured. But chief of all he remembered that he had no orders to retreat even if he could. The bomb squad was to go as far as it could in this communication trench and hold it for the support section. And this section had found the ground too hot and had sought shelter where it could.

Jimmy stared up at the curling smoke above this narrow slit in the earth. Back he crawled past his three wounded comrades and stared again at the rough wall of dirt. The machine-gun was cleverly concealed somewhere there just where it could rake the trench; just as another one was in the next traverse two hundred feet beyond where it had prevented further progress of Corporal May's bombers.

"Got to dig this fellow out!" shouted Jimmy. "The entrance to this dugout is around the

traverse, but the machine-gun in the next traverse covers it so's it can't be touched. Fine work, eh?"

Scanning the smoky dirt wall, Jimmy presently could make out the firing point. It had been well concealed by débris and bits of board, but Jimmy knew that the muzzle of the deadly gun was there and that the operator sat, undoubtedly protected by concrete or steel, immune from anything but a shell unless he could be attacked from the rear—which the other gun prevented. And the machine-gun men would fight to the death—they were left behind for that very purpose, giving their lives to delay the securing of the captured trench until the Germans could organize a counter-attack. Already, from the increasing fire over the top, Jimmy thought this was coming. If the Americans were driven back even to the German first trench, Jimmy and his bunch were gone if they couldn't fall back with their comrades. Lieutenant Miller would think his advance bombing party was all cleaned out when it didn't fall back before the machine-gun enfilade.

The smoky trench now hid all vision back to

the front line, but the machine-gun continued its steady barking. The bombers never could get back unless they stopped that gun which was right by their side but buried in the earth wall.

Jimmy pointed out the machine-gun emplacement to Perkins as the latter crawled to his side.

"Maybe we can batter him down!" yelled Jimmy. "Ready, Perky!"

"Batter ourselves, that's what we'll do!" retorted Perkins. "Too close, and we can't shelter around the traverse or the other fellow will get us!"

That was true. The machine-gun aperture was not twenty-five feet from where the squad crouched. They were safe enough from it, but any bomb directed there would certainly do more damage to the throwers out in the open trench than to the sheltered machine-gun man.

Jimmy wiped his perspiring brow. Perkins shook his head.

"I can go crawl clear up under that fellow's roost and chuck a shot in on him—unless he's closed up in a concrete box, as is likely the case," growled Perkins.

"Yes—and any time you don't make it, you'll

have a bomb going off right in your face," said Tolliver, "for it'll blow right back on you. And if we back out, out of range of our own bomb, why, the gun'll rake us! Fine business, bucky! Oh, very fine!"

Jimmy squirmed around and looked at his three wounded men lying very still in the mud of the trench bottom. He had to get them out and his five unwounded too, and do it on his own initiative if the support failed to come up. And the support couldn't unless this nervy machine-gun operator was silenced. He didn't know how the attack on the German second line had gone, but it was none of his business. If his squad had been dropped down in a barrel it couldn't have been more ignorant of affairs outside.

"There must be a way into that hole, and it's around the traverse wall," argued Jimmy to himself. "We can't rush it, for the fellow up the line will riddle us. But——"

He turned and crawled back to the traverse point and cautiously thrust his head around the wall of dirt and crumbling boards. Two hundred feet up this section the other machine-gun man had a full view of this point and the battle

smoke had not settled in this trench so heavily as Jimmy had hoped. Their own section was dim and choking with the fumes of the bombs and machine-gun volleys.

But Corporal May edged on to where he could look clear up the further section. The wicked *plump-plump* of the bullets still tore into the wall above him, but slowly now. The wily machine-gunner was merely waiting for the sight of a Sammy around that zigzag of wall. Nothing could stand in that narrow slit under his fire, any more than it could in the advanced section beyond.

Jimmy was trying to make out the entrance to the machine-gun nest around the traverse. It was a broken mass of boards, sandbags and crumbled earth where the American artillery had smashed the trench above.

"But there *must* be a hole!" thought Corporal May, "and one man with a couple of bombs could put that fellow out of business."

He called Perkins to him and talked quietly back over his shoulder.

"Keep low here, Perky. Now, it's no manner of use for the squad to rush this. One fellow

might. If I find a hole to drop in, I'm all right. If not, why—well, that man up the ditch will have some quick target practice, I guess. And—" Jimmy looked at Perky's dirty face—"if I—don't make it, you got to get the boys back somehow!"

"Jimmy," retorted Perky, "this is *my* chance!"

"No, it's mine. I'm quick on my feet—just a rush of twenty feet, and if I find something to drop behind I'm all right!"

"And if you don't—" muttered Perky—"all right, Corporal! But you'll find me comin', too!"

Corporal May shook his head. He was measuring the distance with his eye that he had to rush along that battered dirt trench wall in full line of fire from the hidden gunner beyond the first traverse. The entrance to the first machine-gun shelter must be some ten yards away only, but the desperate chance was to find refuge from the other one. Jimmy had unslung his pack and kicked it back. Only his bomb-case he carried with him, for a rifle would do him no good in any case. He either won or lost all on the first rush to bomb out the machine-gun.

"Well," he whispered to Perky, "here for it!"

And hunching his knees up under him he arose swiftly and raced straight along the dirt wall in the face of the crackling bullet hail. He felt a blow on his steel helmet and another smash through his web belt as he made the last bound and flung himself against a huge lump of dirt tumbled from the wall. And *plump—plump—plump!* went the volley from the gun two hundred feet up the trench, spattering above and around and under him, knocking his eyes full of dirt. But he lay in a jagged crevice that some Yankee shell had cracked out of the wall, and in and up this he slid and crouched, staring about.

And there, sure enough, to his left and lower down, was a low wooden frame that had been a door, smashed in and sagging, but it must be the machine-gun shelter exit. The second machine-gun was kicking bullets all over the spot, for the operator knew the lone attacker's purpose.

"We'll see to you later, Fritzie!" gasped Corporal May; "just now I want this particular rabbit!"

Glancing back to the bend of the traverse, he saw a helmet bobbing slowly, close to the trench

wall, and he knew it was Private Perkins keeping a jealous eye on him. If he had gone down wounded in his rush, nothing would have kept a fat and slow soldier from dashing to drag him back. Jimmy waved his hand a bit while he recovered his breath. Then, slowly estimating each inch of his crawl so that he did not uncover his body to the hidden machine-gunner up the trench, he slid and wiggled nearer to the low doorway just where the traverse abutted slightly from the wall.

Then he had to consider. If he rushed the machine-gunner he would have to land clear inside the shelter to avoid the other fellow enfilading the trench. And then he might have to fight single-handed against a trio or more of Boches. And if he stayed where he was he could not be sure of silencing the gun. No, it was attack again. One bomb dropped right into that hole would save the lives of many of his comrades when the next attack came, as come it would, he knew.

So Corporal May wiggled to within ten feet of the entrance. It was a black, jagged hole under broken trench timbers with dirt crumbling

here and there from above as the bullets plugged around it. The last two yards Jimmy crouched on knees and elbows. The snarl of the bullets quickened. He had a sudden idea that the man at the further gun could see him now; if so he had to rush.

So rising swiftly, he made the last lunge that carried him into the shelter entrance and fell headlong out on smooth dirt. Like a scared cat Jimmy was up on his knees. He could hear the cracking of the gun ahead, but it was pitch dark there. The operator apparently did not know he was taken in the rear. Breathlessly Jimmy crawled on, struck a concrete edge, and then, while the deafening racket of the machine-gun was in his ears, he saw a glimmer of murky light. Then the dim profile of a man moving before this.

Corporal May was directly behind the machine-gun and its cool operator, looking straight along the line of sight up the first section of trench down which his squad had come and from which this same gun had driven his company. Not ten feet distant from the busy Boche in that narrow wedge of concrete emplacement!

And when Corporal May's eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, he saw that the enemy was alone. No more men were needed, for either the machine-gun man could hold off a hundred or else he would be mashed out by a heavy shell —it was hard to get them otherwise in their burrows. Jimmy's fingers crept to one of his corrugated deadly cones, slipping it from the case. And then doubt came to him.

"I suppose that fellow would croak me without a thought, but I—somehow, hitting a man in the back with a bomb—it's not quite our style, somehow! Not quite what I'd like to tell—mother about!"

Then he slipped the bombcase strap from his shoulder and crept on. He stood straight up in the shelter behind his enemy and suddenly dropped on him, both arms locked tight around the fellow's shoulders at the elbows, at the same time smashing his knee into the small of his back. Over the gunner went, face down, with a choked cry, but helpless as a child.

"Now," growled Jimmy, "not a wiggle out of you—hear me?"

He was feeling for the German's service pistol

and presently he nudged the muzzle of it into the prisoner's ear, thinking this was better than trusting to his knowledge of English.

"Sure!" exclaimed Jimmy, "any fighting man knows what a gun is! You lie there, Fritzie—for you're done for—you and your little machine."

He crept back and cautiously waved a hand out to the watchful Perkins at the bend of the traverse. Perkins waved joyously back.

"All right!" yelled Jimmy, "I got the rabbit! Now you fellows can go back along that forward section and tell Lieutenant Miller that it's cleaned up. And get the wounded back, too, Perky, if they can go. I'm all right here with Fritzie; and it's healthier inside than out!"

For twenty minutes Corporal May sat cross-legged, watching a silent, sweating German lad who shook his head at every question. The trench out ahead of the machine-gun was full of Sammies now. They barricaded the traverse head and dug through from their own side until they uncovered the concrete shield and then into the shelter where Jimmy and his prisoner sat.



He stood straight up in the shelter behind his enemy
and suddenly dropped on him. . . .

Lieutenant Miller inspected them both when they limped through among the close-packed men of the third platoon.

"I must remark, Corporal May," he began, "that you went a little further than orders were meant for. Just a little bit further than the rest of 'em! But it's all right, for we're holding the line, sir—first and second, too! Otherwise you'd been in bad!"

"Had to take a chance, sir. The company would have been cut up bad trying to come along after us if we hadn't got this fellow!"

"We?" grunted the sweating Perkins, respectfully saluting his officer. *"We*—didn't have a thing to do with it, sir. Corporal May got this B'rer Rabbit out of his hole—all on his own!"

"Never mind," retorted Corporal May, "let me do the talking!"

"Eh?" queried the lieutenant, "it'll have to be looked into—just now I wish we could go on after the second wave—but the orders were to stick here. And stick to orders, Corporal May—after this—unless you can turn a trick as good as this by going over 'em!"

And the dirty, tired, bleeding men down in the captured trench, who looked more like sewer diggers now than neat American soldiers, laughed a bit and flopped down in the mud to smoke a bit and talk it over.

CHAPTER VIII

OUT O' LUCK

IT was the day before B Company received orders, along with the rest of the battalion, to prepare for the return to the front line trenches after its sojourn in the rest billets, that Corporal Jimmy May was conscious of a new and mysterious interest on the part of his comrades in his doings. Although on rest, the fellows were kept busy enough with drills and setting-up exercises to keep them in the pink of physical condition, as well as constant practice in every new line of trench attack and defense. With all the preliminary training, and with the weeks on and off in the fighting lines of the Lorraine sector which had made them steady and precise veterans who had been under bombardment days at a time, and who had participated in three successful attacks on the German positions, bearing their losses in killed and wounded with composure and iron resolution,

the men of Company B found that the higher commands still considered there was a lot to learn for every rank and grade. Bomb and bayonet and rifle grenade work for every squad and platoon of the infantrymen went on unceasingly, along with the more specialized study of wire and trench attack; but with this there were real rest and recreation. As soon as the fellows were cleaned up, clothing and equipment overhauled and put in shape, nearly every company organized a baseball nine, boxing bouts took place in the village streets; while others crowded to the ever welcoming "Y" stations to read, write and gossip about the events of their first battle experiences on the soil of France. When the two weeks' rest period was up no one would have recognized the lusty, rollicking Sammies of B Company as the mud-caked, weary and nerve-racked soldiers who came out of the trenches after the taking of the bit of first line German defenses where Corporal May had alone rushed and captured the machine-gun dugout and so made way for the infantry to consolidate the section against the foe.

Jimmy was hooking up his web belt blanket

roll-carrier before his barrack door when the top sergeant came along and then stopped watching the natty corporal.

"If I was you, Jimmy," grunted Milbank, "I'd put an extry shine on them tough-looking trench boots of yours this evenin'."

"Inspection?" answered Jimmy, though he knew it well enough.

"Oh—everything! Regimental parade with full kit, after a good goin' over of everything we got. Division staff all out too, Jimmy, for the review; and some French generals, so it's all tidied up this outfit must be. And—" the top sergeant looked solemnly at Jimmy—"ain't anybody said anything to you?"

"Me? What are you talking about? I been too busy to listen anyhow—but I hear the battalion's going to a new sector."

"G'wan!" grunted Milbank, "that wasn't what I meant!"

And he strode on, leaving Corporal Jimmy mystified enough.

When the first call for Assembly sounded Jimmy was in his place—fourth man in the front rank of his squad, and looking them over.

Every man of the eight was clean and soldierly, and there was that curious buzz of interest and craning of necks down the company front that Corporal May had noted at drill—looking at him, too, and grinning. Even when the double rank snapped to attention Jimmy felt it; and then, by platoons the regiment swung off to the evolutions before the review of the brigade.

And after awhile the infantry regiment was drawn up in line, conscious that it had marched at its best past the reviewing general officers; and now stood at rest for a moment. Down along the company front of B strode its alert captain glancing searchingly at the front rank. Then he spoke to the platoon leader, and Lieutenant Miller also turned and watched the line. They smiled; and then came the shout of an order from the mounted battalion commander.

"Attention!" roared the lieutenant, and like a swiftly coördinating machine, B Company jerked up to precise formation. Corporal May's eyes were rigidly front like the others; he was just aware that a group of officers were coming from the left; his colonel, and the adjutant, and an unknown American general; and then two

bearded, smiling officers in the horizon blue of the French army, bronzed, sturdy men whose bosoms were covered with decorations. There had been a calling of a name or two from the other battalion on B Company's left, and now, as the officer group reached its front, the adjutant stopped, glanced at a paper in his hand and said sharply:

"Corporal James May!"

Corporal Jimmy relaxed his rigid pose just an instant in surprise, but too surprised to answer; he hadn't been particularly acquainted with regimental staff officers. Then his senior captain repeated the call, and seemed to grin interestedly.

"Yes, sir!" answered Jimmy. "Here, sir!"

"Ten paces to the front, sir," said Lieutenant Miller, and Jimmy strode forward, stopped, gave the rifle salute, but looked neither to left nor right. He found himself in a thin line of other Sammies, a half dozen in all, who had been called out before the reviewing group which had sauntered informally along the front. He shot a nervous glance to his left; the silence in the ranks behind was suddenly oppressive, and Jimmy's

heart was beating almost audibly, he thought. What was it all about anyhow? Then out the corner of his eye he saw the smiling, bearded French officer pinning something to the coat of a terribly embarrassed sergeant of C Company, and then stopping before a lanky Tennessee private next to Corporal May himself.

Lieutenant Miller, just in front of Jimmy, muttered something and stepped back:

"It's one on you, Corporal. The company just kept it away from you for a surprise party! I congratulate you, sir!"

Jimmy gasped. He had to turn his head again to stare. The French general with the tunic covered with decorations, was before him now.

"Attention!" whispered Lieutenant Miller. For the whole group of American and French officers had turned their attention to Corporal May now. The colonel was whispering smilingly to the general of division. Then the French general was speaking; he essayed a few words of English, and then went on rapidly, fervently, in his own tongue of which Corporal May knew hardly a syllable. But he had no need. The

gallant Frenchman was lifting a bronzed cross pendant from a green and red-striped ribbon to pin it against Jimmy May's khaki coat. Then he grasped Jimmy's hand, shook it vigorously —and bent over to kiss Corporal May's bronzed, and now embarrassed, cheek. He patted Jimmy's shoulder and went on:

"Le brave Americain! Je vous salue au nom de France!"

And more, with another hearty handshake, to which Jimmy stammered and said: "Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!"

For, glancing down at his jacket, he saw there the *Croix de Guerre!* The honored decoration of the French Republic with the added bronze palm across the red and green ribbon!

Jimmy hung to his rifle in a rather unsteady "present arms." He knew the group of American officers from the general of division down to his beloved platoon lieutenant were regarding him smilingly. He didn't know what else to say or do, and the French commander was passing him to the other envied Sammy on his right, when Lieutenant Miller pulled at Jimmy's sleeve.

"Salute! Salute!" he whispered. "He said all

sorts of especially nice things of you, sir—your last bit of work in capturing the machine-gun single-handed!"

"Yes, sir!" responded Jimmy, and he came up to shoulder arms and gave the rifle salute as the best he could think of. The great French general seemed to understand, for he turned and saluted Jimmy again, gravely smiling. Then he passed on. Jimmy heard something like a muttered laugh from his own officers—a kindly and appreciative one, too; and a movement behind him, and then all B Company broke into a mighty cheer. One long American yell it was, which the Senior Captain allowed and then checked with a grin; for Jimmy was the only representative of the company who had won this merited distinction in the field.

"That will do, sir!" murmured Lieutenant Miller, "it'll do for a lot of things in your record, Corporal, that we've known of. You won't be allowed to wear the cross of war just yet, but sometime—maybe . . . anyhow, the regiment is proud of you, sir! Return to your place!"

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!" gasped Jimmy, for this was more to fluster the corporal than

bombing a Boche dugout. He saluted and did a nervous right-about to step in the vacant place of his squad. They did not move a muscle but every man of them looked as if only the iron discipline of the ranks kept him from personally handing Jimmy May the "ragging" of his glad young life. Not that a man envied or begrudged Jimmy his distinction, but they just wanted to show him how democratically they felt towards a distinguished service guy.

Then it was a command down the line, and Jimmy found himself barking out: "Squad *right!*" and it was a grand relief to feel the old company wheeling away into column as natural as life, only Jimmy couldn't help glancing down, now and then, at that bit of bronze and ribbon on his breast. He felt suddenly that this was the greatest thing ever; the heroic nation of France in arms had honored him for his bit in returning the debt that America owed for the gallant deeds of Lafayette and his compatriots in the struggle for liberty of Jimmy's own country; and this was better than promotion or praise.

B Company turned "column left" down the

dusty little street where the battalion was quartered, half in some ancient stone houses of a wayside village, and half in wooden barracks erected in the tiny square; and it was not until the top sergeant had dismissed them after the customary inspection and "port arms" that the fellows got their chance at Jimmy May. Then they gave a yell and clustered about, bumping into him with arms and accouterments, sunburned, friendly faces close to his as they dutifully took up their jeering comments:

"Hi, Corporal—they give you the cross of war all on account o' bein' so fussy over yer squad's mess tins, wasn't it?"

"Naw, it was because Jimmy gave a lieutenant-colonel of the general staff such a bawlin'-out for tryin' to cross his guard line when we were tryin' to clean up that mess after the Boche airplanes bombed the engineers' camp."

Jimmy May smiled, as usual, when he had nothing to say. He felt as happy over the full accord among his comrades that he had won his honors fairly as he did over the decoration itself.

Even his gray-mustached old top sergeant

who had been his first drill-master away back in the days before the Mexican service, and who Jimmy felt was entitled to a hatful of medals for his twenty years' faithful grind in the army, looked on the "kid corporal" of B Company with ungrudging eye. Milbank came to him in the dusk, joshed him sarcastically about his cross of war, and then blurted out:

"Jimmy, I s'pose you know we're goin' up to the big front to-morrow?"

"Yes?" muttered Jimmy. "Say, I'm glad for the big stuff!"

"Somewhere up there. Troop trains are comin' into the sidin' to-night. And the company officers looked over all the corporals, and then left it to me."

"Eh?" said Jimmy, sharply. "Don't say they'll pull *me* out of the line for any special duty! I did my share of that!"

"Goin' to pull you out of the line all right! But you'll be along with the gang. I recommended you for the vacant sergeantcy."

"Milbank!" gasped Jimmy, for he thought the old top sergeant might be envious of his luck if any one would. Then he rubbed his chin—

he had twice turned down the chance to be a sergeant when the senior captain had mentioned it. But now—well, he felt he never would refuse anything to Milbank. He had won his way at last into the heart of the gruff old Western campaigner.

"Now, don't say you'll kick about it, kid!" growled Milbank. "For we'll make you take it! I just want 'em to see how I stand—that nothing goes with me in this company except the lad who can put over the work—and so, if I hated you worse than a Hun, I'd still recommend you —get that?"

"You bet I do!" Jimmy jumped out and grabbed Milbank's big, hard hand. "I'd rather have this from you, Sergeant, than the division commander—you understand?"

"G'wan, kid!" growled Milbank. "Maybe I'll never speak civil to you again. You go to the quartermaster and draw your chevrons, that's all, and I guess they'll give you the fourth section to-morrow. But first they're goin' to put us up in the first line for just twelve hours, I hear, to relieve a bunch that got cut up a bit to-day. Then it's the troop train for us, I reckon."

"Glad to hear it! My squad's ready—and it'll be the last little brush I'll have with 'em."

Jimmy turned back whistling softly, feeling up to that precious *Croix de Guerre* safe in his breast pocket. He wouldn't have worn it before the buckies for worlds, just as he felt bashful about announcing that he was to be a sergeant. The gang would have to find it out, that was all! At nine o'clock, when the battalion went splashing off in the dark on a muddy road that led them, after two hours, into the first communicating trenches, he was still the happiest soldier in France. This was his big day all right.

In the communications the company sections slid out into files to follow silently through the dark to their first line stations. Presently it was slip, stagger, sink on the loose "duckboards" in the trenches. Some were afloat in slimy mud, some had their slats broken, and, now and then, a mutter came from some heavily-laden bucky who jammed the heel of his trench boot between these slats and held up the whole line until he twisted free. Jimmy led his weary squad on past traverse after traverse, rest stations and dug-outs, until finally it was halted, and the fellows

lay back against damp clay to allow the other Sammies who had held the firing posts to slip past them on their way out. They were up close to the German lines here, and not a word could be spoken, however great the curiosity of the newcomers as to what the relieved troops knew.

Finally Lieutenant Miller, ahead of Jimmy's file, waved a hand which Jimmy saw first in the reflected starlight on the water in the trench, and with his eight men he slid onward.

"Don't kick up that slush," he whispered back to Perky, "we must be on a ticklish line to have all this caution. Not a word, there, fellows!"

For, as always, the individual men of the squad, even when they crept up to the firing step, and laid across the boards around the feet of the silent look-outs standing to the rifles in the sand-bag parapet—had not the remotest idea of where they were, or what was up. It was just a deep, wet trench, dark and ill-smelling, with the silent stars over the top. The artillery fire was distant here, but the fellows knew that everything was primed and ready on both sides for expected raids, and the least suspicion would light up the whole terrain outside with star bombs and flares

and bring a hail of machine-gun fire. They were trained trench fighters now, and the Boche would never shake their nerves by any trick.

Lieutenant Miller crept up with the whispered instructions to Corporal May, and then disappeared out of the short fire trench. Jimmy crept to two of his squad and ordered them to crawl up in the lookout embrasures between the sacks. The rest of the tired fellows could crouch around below and sleep until relief or an alarm. Dawn was coming when the final disposition was made; then Jimmy, himself, got a chance to drowse off a few moments.

He awoke with a start when Rube Tolliver nudged him. Staring up, he saw the red sun's rays level across the trench top. The gray muddy figures of his comrades were sprawled still sleeping about the feet of the two lookouts. But Tolliver, one of these, had stepped down from the bags, to kick his corporal gently on the neck.

"Somethin' doin', Jimmy—over the top!" whispered Rube, "I can see their line now, for it's light enough to use the periscope, but I took a chance without it. Saw somethin' shiny back of their wires."

Jimmy was on his feet without a word. This little fire trench was the most advanced of a blunt salient and nearest to the German wires, and being on a trifle higher ground he could overlook the lifeless, cloddy stretch of No Man's Land for some distance. Slowly Jimmy straightened up in the sentry's station between the bags. He tried the periscope first, but the night's dew blurred the top glass where it was hidden in the sacks. Then he swung higher, cautiously nestling his dirt-covered steel helmet among the sandbags. He edged his chin up until he could see into the enemy's wires. Here and there he just made out the irregular trenches and bags. A gentle wind touched his face. Then his keen eye picked up what Tolliver had noted. The level sun shone on some dull metallic thing. Further down the German line he saw another.

Then Corporal May dodged back, gasping. He knew!—and it was something Company B had not yet faced! The dreaded gas of the Germans! The level sunrays were striking their projectors as they stealthily uncovered them over the parapets—it was to be a silent gas attack, the

wind just right to carry the death-dealing stuff into the Sammies' lines!

Jimmy whirled about upon Tolliver. "Back with you! Inform Lieutenant Miller—just around the first traverse at the trench phone! It's coming all along the line here, sure as anything!"

The tall soldier floundered out. By this time the squad had been kicked and warned to awakening. Up they scrambled, red-eyed, bewildered, grasping rifles as they swung to their feet.

"Gas attack!" muttered Jimmy, "masks—*position*—there, all of you!"

There was a grumble, a gasp, and, well-trained to just this emergency, every man swung his ready mask up from its case, and then waited while the Corporal took another peep. Already, down the hidden fire trenches, and back in the others, too, a buzz of orders and stealthy comments had come. The section commanders were ordering every man to readiness for the dreaded ordeal. Milbank came floundering into Jimmy's squad with a glance about. Every man was up, mask at position, alert. The grim sergeant approved, and disappeared. It was up to Jimmy

to judge the creep of that deadly green haze which already he could mark drifting on from the Boche line. From each of the German chlorine tanks down their trenches the gas was thicker until it became a green cloud, streaked with brown, and rolling on unevenly, swirling, filling shell holes, licking out tongues, here and there, where the fitful wind swept it.

The silence was oppressive. The men below Jimmy's station fidgeted nervously, staring up at their leader, waiting his word. It was worse than anything yet, that suspense—worse than barrages, or going over the top, or lying low under the machine-gun fire, this creeping, horrible death to every man that was caught by it. The first time for B Company, but Jimmy looked down to whistle nervously at the dogged fortitude with which they trusted him and met it. Not a man would turn back without orders, he knew. Again he looked out.

"Ready, there! Position!——masks, all!"

And with a hurried shuffle, eight masks went over eight bronzed faces under the steel hats. Then each man swung his rifle close, felt of the bayonet clasp, and waited. There would be an

infantry charge after the gas, they well knew, and the Boche must find a line of ready, unscathed American lads eager to dash and meet them. Jimmy stared over again through his big goggles. Suddenly he seemed to taste the sweetish sickness of the stuff, and he jerked his mask lower and tighter. The gas wave had grown to a great, smoky wall now, hurried by the uncertain, rising morning wind.

"Hope the wind comes big," thought Jimmy, "it will spread this stuff thinner and higher. Anyhow they can't charge until they're sure its safe for 'em!"

He saw by the uncertain movements of his squad that they, too, knew the deadly gas was on them, drifting over the top to fill the trench and wind on down the communications. Sergeant Milbank came staggering back to the fire-trench. He motioned Jimmy to follow, and leading his men, Corporal May did so. The sergeant led them around a traverse to the left where the trenches were crowded with goggle-eyed monsters. The gas was not so bad here as in Jimmy's advanced positioin. He saw that the battalion was massing in this trench presumably

for a counter-attack. A moment more a quick, and tremendous barrage fire broke from the American artillery behind them laid upon the German lines to check and confuse the awaiting Huns. Jimmy crept up to the parapet. The gas cloud was dense over the firing pit he had left. Nearer it swept to where he was. But as he stared he seemed to feel a cooler wave on the back of his neck. His eyes were smarting, his mouth filling with water; he wondered desperately if his gas mask was intact. But he could do nothing now. The coolness on his left cheek was growing. Staring again at the gas wall, he suddenly choked a yell of joy. Then he did turn to bawl muffledly into Lieutenant Miller's ear.

"It's going back! Going *back,* and the wind's changed!"

His commander leaped higher on the parapet. He waved his hand to the senior officer. There were muffled shouts above the roar of the 75's back at the artillery stations. Jimmy could see the white shrapnel puffs breaking over the German front lines. But best of all he saw the gas wave now blown and driven in irregular patches,

spreading back past the German wires upon the fellows who had ejected it.

A puff of sweet, clean air touched his face as he accidentally knocked his mask up a bit. The next minute he jerked it off with a yell.

"It's on 'em! It's got 'em! Hear 'em yell over there!"

The Sammies could hear the confusion in the Boche trenches. Suddenly the officers came hurrying in among the crowded men. Lieutenant Miller had his own mask off and was waving it.

"Ready, there! Masks off, Sergeant! Steady all along, now. In a minute you're going to follow—dash for those shell-holes just inside their wires, and hold 'em for the big attack! They daren't leave their own holes now!"

The next minute there came a short whistle, and the lieutenant went to the parapet top. Jimmy May, with a yell to the men behind him, followed; and all along the line the Sammies poured out and ran heavily for the great shell-holes. The Germans opposite them were unable to fire a shot, so great was the confusion when the gas blew back on their lines. Then came a rattle of machine-gun volleys further down the wires. But

the Sammies opposite this sector deluged the machine-gun nests with rifle fire. Floundering on in the irregular line Jimmy met the German wires, ducked and sidestepped, found the narrow openings and was through in a mob of cheering Sammies. Ten yards beyond he flung himself into a great crater with nine other doughboys. The others of the raiding battalion had found shelter equally close to the German line. But none dared go further now. The treacherous gas was in the Boche trenches and would get friend and foe alike. In the shell crater the air was good, for it had been to the left of the main gas deluge and had got little of it. So here, the perspiring, eager Sammies clung to the clods and listened to the bombardment swing over their heads on the German rear trenches. They were too close to the German lines for the American guns to work there now. But an airplane swung low over their heads along the Boche trench, its machine-gun rattling down upon the defenders. Then came another intrepid airman, and another, swinging safely above the gas.

"Bet those Huns'll study the weather before they shoot over another bunch of chlorine!" sang

out Perkins, grinning out of the mud at Corporal May. "First time for B Company, and I guess we stood the racket! Hello, there's the whistle! I guess over we go again!"

Perky started to rise, then fell headlong over the clods. Jimmy leaped up to see what the section leader's whistle was. Then he sank back, waving his arm.

"Position, there! Masks—the wind's swinging the stuff, and a new projector's uncovered! Steady, there—masks, boys!"

For they saw the hideous greenish-brown cloud shoot up directly opposite them now. And the rising wind swung this new attack so they could not escape it. But Jimmy glanced confidently back; every man would be ready to game it out. Then he heard a groan.

"Perky!" whispered Jimmy, and crawled near his old comrade.

Blood was seeping down Perky's elbow, but Perky was not minding that.

"A sniper winged me a bit," groaned Perkins, "but Jimmy—my mask! Smashed it when I fell —and the stuff's comin'! O, I don't want to die that way, Jimmy!"

Jimmy gave one look at Perky's white face. It was too true. Another moment and he would die floundering in the crater with his comrades helpless to aid. Then Jimmy started up swiftly.

He tore off his belt and pack carrier, and then his coat.

"Wrap this over your head, Perky, and make a try for it—back!"

The stocky little soldier staggered up. The snipers were cutting the whole space from both sides, and Perky seemed bewildered. Jimmy groaned himself, for his old bunky was floundering in a circle.

"He's crazy!" muttered Jimmy. Some one came crawling into his shell-hole. He looked about to see Lieutenant Miller. The young officer raised his mask a moment, for the gas was not yet on them.

"I know what you want, Corporal," he muttered. "Against orders to help any wounded man back while action is on, but—if you want to take the chance . . . your old bunky, eh?"

Jimmy needed no more. Up he dashed and back, reaching Perky half-way on the bullet-swept open. Grasping the bewildered man by

the unwounded arm, he dragged and pushed, while the spiteful *z-z-zing-zing*—swept around them. Then a yell went up as the two reached the sandbags—a half-dozen Sammies reached to drag them to shelter.

Jimmy fell flat on his back in the mud. When he sat up, his old top sergeant was fanning clean, good air in his face. Perkins had been hustled back to the first-aid dugout, and to be refitted with a mask. The little trouble was over out in front. The discomfited Huns had been compelled to give up five hundred yards of their own first line and the victorious Sammies were in it, cautiously cleaning it up, as the gas drove away on the wind.

But Corporal May sat on the muddy duckboards disconsolately rummaging in his khaki coat. "Now, what you think, Sergeant?" he yelled, "I lost my cross of war the very first day I had it!"

"Yer out o' luck, kid," grunted Milbank, "out o' luck, as they say in the Army! But to-night we'll make a crawl-patrol to find it—all B Company would volunteer to go fetch that trinket back f'r you!"

CHAPTER IX

THE ROAD TO BERLIN

AND Top Sergeant Milbank made good on that declaration. He laid the matter before the company officers who knew well enough that every bucky in the outfit considered Jimmy's cross of war an honor to the whole organization. It didn't need Eddie Perkins' description of the manner in which Jimmy had dragged him away from the gas attack to send fifty volunteers out for the lost *Croix de Guerre.* The expedition fell in with the plans to send over reconnoitering patrols the coming night to see if the Germans had come back to their captured first-line trenches, which the Sammies, themselves, had abandoned after destroying everything of value in a military way.

Corporal May had not yet been assigned to a sergeant's duties, though he had his chevrons of the rank across his olive drab arms. So it was still as Corporal Jimmy that he led out his squad

this night before the moon arose. Sergeant Milbank went over the top with twenty men down the line; and the patrols were instructed to spread out beyond the German wires and then push on their best scouts here and there to see if the Boches had returned.

But Jimmy had permission first to set his squad at a hand-and-knee search along the line of retreat he had come with the wounded Perky, to find his decoration. He had studied the spot carefully before dark, so that the eight men, when the first faint glow of the moon came in the east, could work along his path. They were given fifteen minutes to retrieve Jimmy's lost cross of war, and after that must be on to join Milbank's patrol beyond the wires. As there was little likelihood of the Boches having come back to their own front line, where the Sammies had routed them after their disastrous gas maneuver, caution was a bit relaxed. But Jimmy, sitting on the edge of the big shell crater, looking at his luminous watch dial, disconsolately knew that he had not found his decoration, and time was up. He waited until the squad had come silently

in, one by one, and then muttered his instructions.

And then, suddenly, his big, lanky bomb-thrower, Rube Tolliver, swept an arm around Jimmy's neck and flopped something up against his gas mask carrier.

"Right-O! Jimmy—rubbed my nose right onto it just where you give Perky that last boost when he fell! B Company's in luck again!"

Jimmy grasped his precious bit of bronze and ribbon; then his old bunky's hand. The dark figures shuffled about in the shell crater, muttering stealthily—they had been more intent on finding the lost *Croix de Guerre* than winning a battle, so it was with jubilant, friendly whispers that the squad strung out, column-file, after the corporal on his way through the first wires. As for Jimmy, he chucked the trinket down in his flannel shirt pocket this time, resolved that he would turn it into the regimental adjutant's hands for safe keeping as soon as he could.

He turned his face out to No Man's Land confidently—a blackened indistinguishable face, like all the others, for the night patrol must show no light-colored object out there where a German

star bomb might show up the whole terrain in vivid white light any instant. The squad went on silently, and picked up one of Milbank's outposts presently. The sergeant, himself, had gone into the abandoned German trenches two hundred yards to the left, the scout said, and the whole outfit was to follow, pass this and go on to form a trap for any wandering Boche patrol that ventured back.

Sergeant Milbank and Corporal May lay out over the disordered German parapet and whispered. Other American patrols would be out, left and right, and they must form contact so that no disastrous mistake occurred if the hostile groups were suspected.

"Better take the extreme right of your line yourself," murmured Milbank, "and keep the gang a bit behind, for you're the best scout of 'em, Jimmy. You'll find a communication runnin' back, and you better work it close and slow. If they send out workin' parties they'll follow that ditch. First sign of anything, you beat it back, and we'll lay for 'em. And don't start nothin'! Our guns are ordered to lay off this line, and let us doughboys do it all to-night."

Jimmy nodded. The patrol was out for prisoners to-night, for the intelligence department wanted to know just what troops were opposing the Sammies here; whether the crack Bavarian corps, which the Americans had driven back once, was now withdrawn to help in the big German smash to the westward on the way to Paris.

"Bring in some live ones!" whispered Jimmy to Tolliver, when the squad was again away, slowly and silently paralleling the captured German trench until the Corporal, in the lead, made out the dim, irregular line leading back which he knew to be the communication ditch. "All right now—and if we can jump a lone patrol and take him without a sound, it'll be just the ticket! Indian stuff, Rube!"

They raised their heads to watch over the fire trench.

The silence was uncanny. The black earth everywhere, the stars twinkling sleepily, and the faint glow of the moon just showing the bulk of the Champagne hills off to the right and behind the enemy's positions. A gun grumbled far away behind that ridge and now and then a blotch of distant white light showed where a flare had

burst as some sector of the foeman grew uneasy. But all along the half mile of battleground, which the battalion had won to-day, absolute silence.

Jimmy wormed over the sandbags, dropped to the trench bottom, found a hand hold and climbed up. From this point the communication trench was as empty as the first line ditch. He saw a battered helmet, a little further on a machine-gun wrecked and buried in dirt, scattered clothes and broken boarding where the American guns had mauled the works. Every twenty feet along the communication way, Jimmy stationed one of his patrol; then he and Tolliver took the advance. They would creep on now, inch by inch, hardly breathing, until they had established silent contact with the foe. They must discover just how much of the back area the Boches had abandoned, before a combat patrol could make that stealthy raid for the desired prisoners. They must find the enemy but not be found; an alarm would expose the whole series of squad patrols up and down the front to the deadly machine-guns under the lighting star bombs. It had to be

"Indian stuff" as Jimmy said; search out the foe and escape back unseen and unheard.

The maps had shown that the Boche's second lines were two hundred yards back from the captured front; and now Jimmy reflected that he must have come half that way along the communication. At the fourth traverse encountered, after he had wormed up to the bend on his stomach and stared long down the dark ditch, he felt uneasy that he heard or saw nothing. It was midnight and if the Boches had any intention of slipping back to repair their front line to-night they ought to be stirring. They knew that the Sammies had not tried to consolidate the lost position as yet, for it was a dangerous salient unless the Americans took the adjoining higher ground where the machine guns were hidden.

Big Rube Tolliver came elbowing alongside his corporal and whispered. Either the Germans had retreated much further back, or else they were going to come on the left where Milbank's party would pick them up. If a shot was fired up there Jimmy's squad was to get back hastily to the wires, and come in with the main section.

But half an hour of waiting grew monoto-

nous. Corporal Jimmy was afraid the distorted moon would struggle from behind the clouds and make it altogether too light for these two lone Sammies, or that some one of his squad strung back along the communication would get nervous and betray the patrol. The dark seemed to be peopled with mysterious and creeping enemies, even to Corporal May's firm, sane imagination. Finally he turned and nudged Tolliver gently.

"Let's move on—we got to get a line on 'em, if we crawl all the way to the Rhine, Tolly! Follow me, but keep in touch with my foot."

The two scouts slipped on another hundred feet, stopping to listen, watch, every rod of it. Then on, warily to a bend of the trench, just beyond which they made out a tremendous excavation where a huge high explosive shell had wrecked wall and dugout. But it was all silent, deserted. Jimmy wallowed over the crater edge, stumbled among splintered boards and torn, corrugated iron, then beckoned to his comrade.

"Here's a hole! Say, and it's all quiet above. Let's go under. We might want to use this passage in the drive to-morrow. At least the guns

will want to spot it, so's to keep them from using it again."

At the wrecked mouth of the narrow tunnel they listened. The air was fresh, but slightly acrid with old fumes driven in by the great shell undoubtedly. And down the three low steps and then along in the pitch dark hole Corporal Jimmy May stole noiseless as an Indian.

He loosened his grenade bag and fixed one in his right hand, and slipped his left shoulder loosely through his rifle strap. If anything stirred ahead a hand bomb would be first, then a dash back. He thought once it would be better policy to leave Tolliver at the tunnel mouth, but then Jimmy rather felt like having a pal near in this mysterious underground excursion into enemy land. When he stopped, Tolliver stopped. They checked their breath, listened and stole on. Presently they found the path descending irregularly, and Jimmy could no longer touch the side wall. He didn't discover this for some moments, and then he halted upright, rigid. This was dangerous business now! They had nothing to guide their steps in what appeared to be a roomy cavern of the French hills.

Jimmy backed into his comrade's arms; standing close together they whispered a startled conference. In Jimmy's pocket was his flashlight but he feared to take a chance with it. They might be in an underground shelter for a thousand soldiers of the Kaiser. Still, Jimmy reasoned, there would be some light or sound—not this absolute desertion. He stole a few yards further on the dry, firm bottom, then sat down to think it over. Tolly joined him and whispered:

"About goin' back, now—how we goin' to find the tunnel in this big cave?"

Jimmy was silent. They were taking a chance on that, especially if they started any sort of rumpus with an invisible enemy. And after a bit, watching in the pitch dark, he touched Tolly's arm.

"A lighter patch—to your left, see?"

Tolliver touched him in turn for assent. They stared at a faint blur on the adjoining black. With a silent signal Jimmy arose and stole noiselessly on. Presently the blur lightened. Closer the two scouts moved. A white bulk showed, and then they saw they were staring

out a cavern entrance upon a distant moonlit slope across a valley of the Champagne hills. Reaching the bowlders about the hole, they crawled until they saw each way. They had come out behind the ridge which marked the main positions of the enemy here; a little valley sheltered a few fires burning dimly far below them and to the left.

Jimmy almost whistled his jubilance. They would have some report to make now; something to mark down for the high-angle fire of the American guns, for this surely would be a perfect assembling place for the Germans if they essayed a mass attack on the Sammies' lines! But scouting out the little cave entrance he concluded it was not used. The ground fell away steeply for some hundreds of feet down to a wooded creek. The German heavy guns could be all along there in these woods firing over the ridge and the airplanes would have a hard time spotting them. Corporal May began to make determined estimates of distance and declivity; he thought they had not come more than fifty feet down in the cave, nor more than two hundred yards from the outer side. The German second

and third lines were surely right above him on the rocky ridge, and he and Tolly were way inside their defenses.

"I hope nothing starts up there," he whispered, "we'd be in a fine fix if they drove our patrols back. The orders were for every one to be back at all events by three o'clock. Our guns will be beating 'em up at daylight."

"Sure," muttered Tolliver, "but we don't know yet how the Germans come into this cave, or what they use it for except to man their first lines—and they've quit that now. There's another way in, Jimmy, besides this little lookout down here."

The rock wall bent to the right, so Jimmy signaled that they would scout that way. A glance at his concealed luminous watch showed that they had three hours more before the recall. They felt they could move faster now, for they were sure the cave was untenanted.

Big Tolliver had taken the lead in this silent feel along the rocks, and suddenly Jimmy knew that he had stopped short, startled. Instantly he, too, grew rigid, his hand slipping again about a grenade in his case. If discovered they would hurl one bomb and dash back blindly for the other

exit. But Tolliver was whispering excitedly. Creeping a yard on, Jimmy put his hand to his comrade's belt. Tolly took it and slipped Jimmy's fingers on to touch something. And Corporal May thrilled at that touch. His hand was upon steel—smooth convex surfaces, coming to a point—then Jimmy felt the capless end of a shell —a big eight or ten-inch shell, at least! He felt on and touched another, then another—the cavern floor was filled with them!

The two venturing Sammies had come upon a hidden high explosive magazine of the German artillery which was so carefully camouflaged down in the belt of timber of the valley.

"Whew!" breathed Jimmy, "of course there's nobody home at this end, but somewhere beyond, where the ammunition supply gangs work, there will be all right!"

He and Tolliver leaned over the close-packed park of big shells conferring, lip to ear, even as they listened.

"Back for us," whispered Tolliver, "there'll be somebody guarding this stuff!"

Jimmy was stealing along to the opening in the rocks. The moonlight was lighter now on the

far slope, showing up the ravine more clearly. And to his right, as he peered among the bowlders, Corporal May saw what he had expected—a sort of traveled path with a chute that led down from this ridge. The German ammunition gangs entered the cave magazine some hundred yards to the right and with their shell trucks trundled the big steel boys down and off to the hidden gun positions. It was a capital magazine, safe from airplane bombs or any high-angle fire the Americans could direct.

"But where?" breathed Jimmy, "and what are they doing now?"

He crept on feeling down the line of big shells. There must have been thousands of them. Presently he struck a stack of wooden cases, and then lumber—the place seemed to be a general store house of German war material. Suddenly Jimmy stumbled over a little steel track, floundered, crouched—and listened. No alarm came anywhere. When Tolliver crept to him, he whispered and went on. Touching the little track rails with his foot he felt safe enough from falling into any trap. The truck track certainly must lead to the main ammunition run where the

shells were delivered down to the supply system along the wooded creek. Two hundred feet on, the track bent to the left, skirting the great park of projectiles. And here the two adventurers paused, watching a lighter patch beyond.

"There'll be a magazine guard there, sure," whispered Jimmy, "but there's no stuff being run out to-night. I reckon they've got troubles enough up above us fixing for us to attack again, or getting set for a drive of their own."

"I guess we discovered enough anyhow, Corporal!" muttered Tolliver. "If we counter-attacked and took this ridge, we'd capture all this stuff. But they'll never allow that. Say—Oh!——"

For the big bucky dropped instantly between two of the great shells, staring wildly at his corporal. Jimmy, too, was down. And well they did, for suddenly the whole track and the gray cavern had flashed into dusky light. Over their very heads and back the way they had come a string of incandescent lamps lit everything!

Beyond, at the head of the ammunition slide they saw now the figures of half a dozen Germans. They were getting up sleepily at a re-

peated gruff order from a sergeant who had switched on the lights from the magazine entrance! A couple of fellows rattled a steel truck onto the track, and in another instant they were pushing it back towards the two Sammies.

Jimmy signaled swiftly to his friend. It was no use to run down the track under the string of lights. They must squeeze into the big shell field and hide. Here and there there was room, but crawling among the big explosives with rifles, bomb bags and all their kits was difficult. Any noise, now, would be fatal. Jimmy stopped five yards from the track, wedged fast, knowing from the sound of the truck that now he must be silent as death. He heard a shuffle to his left. Tolliver also had lain flat among the giant shells.

The groups with the truck came on, stopped thirty feet away and they heard the clanging of the little crane in the roof timbers that loaded the big shells on the truck. The Germans said hardly a word, but worked slowly like tired men just aroused to a monotonous task.

"Funf!" growled the sergeant suddenly, *"Das genugt!"*

The crane was swung back, the little car began

to creak on with the squad shoving it. One soldier behind stopped suddenly, picked up something at his feet and muttered:

"Siehe!"

The sergeant growled, then took, from the fellow who was staring stupidly at it, a small, corrugated steel cone. Jimmy could just glimpse their caps and hands raised to the thing. The sergeant gasped: it was one of Tolliver's American hand grenades which had come from its case as he crawled into the shell park.

"Halt an!" shouted the *unterofficier,* and the truck stopped.

They gathered about bursting into surprised talk. The sergeant roared and gesticulated, seeming to demand explanations. The Boches seemed to recognize the deadly token; they argued excitedly, and now the officer ordered them from the truck and back into the cavern.

They went on still talking and looking furtively beyond the ammunition park where the lights ended. When they had reached a safe distance, Jimmy May wriggled free and crept around the cylindrical shells until he could tug at Tolliver's legging.

"The first chance—back! There'll be an investigation now, when some officer gets this! But quiet, now—they won't see us here!"

True enough, presently the gang came back, the sergeant still growling puzzledly. Perhaps it was a captured hand bomb, but how did it come to be left in the magazine? The ammunition party was unarmed save for the sergeant's pistol. But Jimmy thought desperately that, to get back in the cavern, he and Tolly must take the track—they could not crawl far among the close-packed shells; they had been lucky to find even a moment's concealment. If the Germans stayed in the magazine, he and his comrade were done for.

The truck was pushed slowly on. When Jimmy decided it had reached the mouth of the dump, he peered out on the track. There, as he feared, fifty feet away stood the *unterofficier* listening and puzzled. Another fellow beyond the car bawled out to the open.

"Bad stuff!" thought Jimmy, and kicked Tolliver's leg. "Say, I think we better run for it." Another look down the track and he knew they must; he saw the gleam of bayonets around the

ammunition truck. Some guard detail had been summoned!

"Wait!" whispered Jimmy, "the sergeant is turning to meet 'em! We mustn't let 'em get any closer—it's best now! Run straight out from the shells and maybe the light will show the tunnel we came in by! Only chance, Tolly! —once in the tunnel we can fight 'em maybe—bluff 'em back with a bomb and get back to the trenches!"

Stealthily they slipped to their knees, crouching by the line of shells; then, after one look back, Jimmy whispered:

"Now, up—slow! Creep until they see us—then run for it!"

But Tolliver's big crouched back had hardly arisen level with the shell tips, when a startled yell went up. Jimmy, in the lead, tore away. He heard Tolliver panting behind him. Shouts, orders, the clatter of feet followed. Reaching the bend of the track at the corner of the big shell park, Jimmy leaped over it and ran straight on in the unlighted portion of the cavern. It seemed the dusky wall over there showed the hole by which they had come. But suddenly a volley

blazed down the tracks at them; the Germans could fire now with the far rocky wall for a bullet-stop.

But on the fugitives raced. Jimmy saw the tunnel end now joyously, but as he was slackening speed to enter it, his heart seemed to stop. He saw the spiked helmet of a German officer slowly appear there. Behind him a file of men issuing. The leader dodged and shouted as the bullets from the other group richochetted on the rocks about them. In the dim light he failed to recognize the two Sammies who halted twenty paces away. Then, with a cry to his comrade, Corporal May dashed off to his left. Eighty feet that way he remembered the little unused opening out to the valley. That it merely took him down to the German lines he cared not. Out of that hole he must get and take a chance of escape.

Among the bowlders at the entrance he collided violently with Tolliver. They staggered back, turned swiftly to face the yelling pursuers. Jimmy was fair outside the cave when he saw that his friend had stumbled, and not twenty feet beyond, the first of the Boche party was already

raising his bayonet to down-stroke the fallen man.

And back Jimmy started. Tolliver was on his feet now and dodging under Jimmy's arm. There seemed dozens of excited Germans in the cavern, dark figures running here and there; farther back the dim incandescents gleamed on wavering bayonet points. Jimmy took one look down the slope of the moonlit valley. If they had a half hour's respite they might scramble up the slope outside and find some way to pass the German trenches back to their own patrols. It was a desperately slim chance, but the only one. But they had to check this close pursuit to have even that chance.

So, clicking the time fuse on the grenade in his hand, Jimmy let it go fair in the narrow cavern mouth. He saw it went too high, sailing far over the heads of the charging enemies. But Tolliver let one go with better range and time. The next instant came the muffled explosions of both bombs in the cave—yells, screams and orders in under that swift back-puff of acrid smoke.

Instantly Jimmy and Tolly sped away from

the cave mouth, seeking not to descend the slope but to find a way up the rocky and tree-covered ridge. The moon was not high enough to light this side of the valley, and presently they went on slower, trying to pick a path. They had heard shouts down below, but not a Boche seemed to appear from the small cave entrance. The bombs must have driven the pursuers back in clean panic, if any of the leading groups had lived to do so.

Jimmy had stopped a moment among the rocks, as Tolliver came to him. They were both gasping, unable to speak for a time. And suddenly they heard an explosion somewhere—not loud but heavy and checked as if seeking space.

"Say," groaned Tolliver, "keep on—not up, but off to the right! Maybe we started something . . . get off this ground, Jimmy, it's no good place to be!"

And they went staggering on, slightly upward but veering on to the right, and presently, Jimmy dropped into a shallow, well-beaten path easily traveled and leading towards the starlight on the ridge.

"This leads to a communication, Tolly,"

gasped the Corporal, "on, right up to their lines! But I don't care—I'm too—winded—to fight, or run!"

"Let's get off this trail," grunted Tolliver, "and creep down in them rocks and get our nerve back again! But I reckon we're goners, Jimmy! It's over the Rhine for us, to some prison camp!"

Jimmy staggered to a crevice, forty feet away from the path, and crawled out under some dusty weeds. From a gap in the ridge he could see the moon now, wavering and drawing up; and he thought bitterly of the short way it was back to the Sammies' line—just over this hill a bit. It was three o'clock—the patrol would be waiting impatiently for all the scouts to come in.

Captured! Jimmy ground his teeth together; no, he'd rather die up here, fighting a Boche battalion! Down in his flannel shirt pocket, wet with sweat, he felt the *Croix de Guerre*—it should never go to the Kaiser as a war trophy, never!

"Listen," grunted Tolliver, weakly, "there's a racket down there—and a fire, too."

They could see the dim reflection of some glow in the deep, narrow valley. It flickered on the

trees, and roads; and they saw men moving, and could hear faint cries. And then on this paltry activity, there came a sudden, jarring shock—the rocks reeled and heaved under them, and then the most diabolical roar three hundred yards to their left they had ever dreamed of. Up over the intervening trees and bowlders through the moonlight, went an enormous white, gray and black twisting cloud. They heard a series of muffled explosions one after the other, tearing shattering sounds under that pall of dirt and smoke that spread far over the little valley. Then the scream and whistle of flying rocks and fragments above them, hailing down over all the ridge.

After that there was comparative silence, save for that dull and continued series of explosions under the earth apparently. But nothing like that first terrific crater burst.

Tolliver sat up and dusted his khakis. He looked solemnly back to a dim, murky glow in the valley which showed now and then through eddying smoke wreaths.

"Something started, Jimmy! I guess we messed up a little fire that got into something

before those boys could put it out. We blew up that whole hillside, Jimmy!"

"It was worth the hike," muttered Jimmy, "but that don't say how we're going to get back. Captured, Tolly!—a prisoner in Germany! I won't stand for it!"

Jimmy got up wrathfully and dusted off his clothes. Then the two soldiers stood staring up the moonlight way to the ridge. They heard voices, there—German voices, coming back along the trail, officers passing rapidly down from the trenches on the hilltop.

"Good night," murmured Tolliver, after them, "the Boches are all around us, Corporal—you got to think quick now!"

Jimmy May was too tired to think. He sat down staring wistfully at the moon. Same old friendly moon that would shine on the distant shores of America in a few hours—but where would he be?

CHAPTER X

CAMOUFLAGE FOR TWO

"IT don't look good," muttered Rube Tolliver, gloomily, staring off at the pink glow of dawn in the east. "We can't keep on goin' over the hill, Jimmy. The Boches are thick there—thick as bees. If we were goin' to try and slip through their lines we ought to have pulled it before daylight."

"Wasn't a show with that section of 'em coming back from their second line and flopping down for a rest all along among the trees. But I guess we waited too long anyhow."

Corporal May sat up, hungry and hollow-eyed. He could see the round capped, clumsily dressed Bavarians not a hundred feet away from their hiding place. A little wheeled kitchen had been dragged from some point along the hill and stopped under the oak trees, and already the Boches had gathered about it. The smells of the breakfast came to the hungry Sammies' nostrils.

Rube Tolliver lay back again in the rock crevice and chewed a weed.

"I suppose," grumbled Jimmy, disconsolately, "we ought to get up and walk down to those fellows with our hands up. Ain't a show! And if they knew we were the fellows who blew up the magazine, they'd shoot us anyhow."

"All depends on what kind of officer we bump into. Wouldn't trust 'em! And say, there goes the little mornin' howdy off to our left. Lucky though that our guns can't possibly drop a shell along the under side of this hill. It's certainly a grand position for the Fritzies to snug up under."

Even as the two lone Sammies grumbled an American shell came rising over the front ridge in a beautiful white arc above their heads and burst behind the wooded belt in the valley behind them. They could hear the heavy slam of the big guns far off to their left, both German and American, but the camouflaged batteries immediately in their rear were silent. Down in the little valley under the drifting morning mists and the smoke still left from the magazine explosion,

Jimmy and Rube could see the tiny figures of men. Streams of them went along the creek road and disappeared under the bulge of the hill.

"I guess they got a lot of mess to clean up," said Jimmy, "and maybe we disorganized their whole ammunition train system by that bust-up, —it was grand while it lasted!"

"I reckon it was worth it—but it's tough on you and me. We'll see the rest of this yere war from behind some barbed wire fence over the Rhine, Jimmy,—that's what hurts."

So the two listened gloomily to the rising rumble of the guns. Nothing short of a successful infantry attack by the Sammies on the defenses along this ridge would get them free. And they knew the second and third lines up there were too strong for any immediate capture. The two Americans could not move without being seen by the Boches, dozens of whom had already passed each way by the path near which Jimmy and Rube lay in the weeds and rocks.

Jimmy argued and argued in his mind. With his rifle and service pistol and two hundred rounds of ammunition he hated to surrender; yet

if he didn't he and Rube would face hundreds of foes at the first move.

"Rotten!" he growled, "this was one thing I never did dream of!".

He was unlacing his legging and pulling off a shoe. Rube watched his corporal dismally.

"What's up, Jimmy?"

"My cross of war. Best bet is to stick it in my stocking. We might as well go in, Rube. We're goners, all right."

For Jimmy got up in the coming sunlight and looked straight down the path up which a long line of heavily-laden infantrymen was toiling. The officers walked to one side, and would tramp straight on the fugitives. There was no use in startling them—it might mean a bayonet from some excitable *unterofficier.*

So Jimmy stood up defiantly, dusting his clothes again. He saw the leading officer staring curiously at him even before Jimmy began to yell and wave his hand.

"Hi!—whatever it is in Dutch!—how about some breakfast!"

The young officer fairly gasped. Another one barked something, and the marching column

stopped. The officer came on. Six paces away he stopped, stared first at the two erect Sammies, then down at their rifles, grenade packs and service automatics all piled in a neat military little layout. Jimmy almost laughed at the German's amazement.

"Americans!" gasped the latter in excellent English. The elder officer coming up cried out in German. A squad of the soldiers swung out from the column. The captain turned to the others:

"Vorwärts!"

And the column trudged on, the soldiers looking with dull surprise at the group by the roadside. How two American infantrymen had got inside their lines fully armed and unhurt, must have amazed them but only the officers took notice.

The young *oberlieutenant* folded his arms looking at Jimmy May who stared steadily back.

"You have come from—where?"

"Never mind—sir. We surrender—that's all, isn't it?"

"But in our lines!" The officer turned to the captain who was demanding explanation. They

conferred in gutturals. The squad sergeant placed his men around the prisoners. The captain spoke on, and the lieutenant evidently explained that the Americans refused to answer questions. And after more confab, the captain went on after his company, with final commands to his under-officer.

The lieutenant pointed down the path and spoke sharply.

"Down that way! We shall find out about this!"

And Jimmy May and Rube Tolliver started off under the squad guard which carried their discarded equipment. When they reached the creek road the sergeant led the way. Over their heads Jimmy saw a trio of shells far and high—American shells, that dipped down on the further ridge and exploded—how he wished he might have got word back to the guns just where the German howitzers lay concealed in the wooded creek!

A mile or more along the dusty road the escort trudged, past disorderly huts of the Boche artillery, supply trains and repair stations. Under the frowning hill towards the American lines the

valley slope was thick with all sorts of enemy activity. Lines of sloven soldiers at the kitchens stared indifferently at the two Sammies, but the escort kept them on until they were shoved into one end of a long wooden barrack. There the sergeant growlingly indicated they could rest, and Jimmy and Rube threw themselves down on the hard boards, tired, dirty, hungry, stared at their four guards, and then at the other end of the shed behind a little railing of which the lieutenant was making a report to some officers at a table.

After an hour a dirty kitchen boy brought them some black bread and a concoction that passed for coffee. They drank and munched silently, and presently a sergeant summoned them to the railed portion of the guard barrack. Standing by the table the young lieutenant who had brought them in, questioned them—a very perfunctory questioning, it became, for the two Americans refused to answer much and the officers soon saw they would get little.

But from the conference Jimmy gathered that the Germans supposed that he and Tolliver were the sole survivors of an American raiding party that had entered the magazine and which had

been wiped out by the explosion along with scores of the Boches. And instantly Jimmy pretended to assent to this; he had an uneasy feeling that if the enemy knew this stunt had been pulled off by two lone Sammies it would go hard with them. Their grenades had started a fire which had communicated to the boxed explosives, and then to the main magazine, and the Germans had failed to stop it. The prisoners guessed that the howitzer batteries camouflaged along the creek, had been entirely put out of business for the time being.

Presently they were led to another room, ordered to strip and their clothes were searched minutely. And Corporal May went to sweating hard; he would have lost an arm rather than his *Croix de Guerre!*

But as the sergeant and the guards watched them standing stark naked, while they felt over the uniforms, Jimmy did what he thought was a mighty clever piece of work. There was a little pile of dust and sweepings by the bench where he stripped off and, pulling his sock inside out leisurely, he slipped the war cross into this stuff and then casually brushed the dirt over it. Then

he watched the Boches search his shoes, legging, trousers' linings—every inch of his stuff, even into his hair and ears. After that, with a grunt, their clothes were flung back to them—and Jimmy's fell square over his hidden war cross! He almost laughed when he craftily palmed it back into his shoe and laced his legging again—he had outgeneraled the dunderheads to start with!

Then they were given a number and a tag corresponding with the number opposite their names in a book which evidently contained all that the Germans were able to guess about them; and then ordered curtly out. Half an hour later four more prisoners marched into the guard barrack; three French *chasseurs* and a lanky American artilleryman who gaped to discover his fellow countrymen.

"Hello!" he said. "Out o' luck, hey? What's yer outfit?"

Jimmy started to answer when the German sergeant bawled out warningly. The Frenchman shrugged, and all were silent. The tall artilleryman growled, but they all sat down, unwashed, hungry again and depressed. It was high noon when they were ordered out and joined

another prisoner squad a mile down the creek—all French, these last were—and then the little forlorn column marched away again with a sullen guard forward and rear. The road wound up the opposite hill, through a shell-torn vineyard and village, all deserted, for this slope was under the fire of the allied guns. Shells were breaking lazily along the valley, and a silver airplane sailed serenely up, skirting the German lines but very high. Jimmy watched the bird of freedom hungrily; he had a terrible depression now, feeling out of everything, cut off, buried alive—as if for him, personally, the great war had suddenly stopped, and he was a dirty, no-account tramp merely wandering on over the world without home or duty.

Over this next ridge the prisoners passed roads along which German infantry lay idly among their arms' stacks; and fields where guns were parked; and temporary headquarters were marked by divisional flags, and groups of gray motor cars. It looked as if a big concentration was being effected here, and Jimmy wondered. They crossed several little field railways running parallel to the hills and with confusing switches

branching off here and there upon which stood military trains. Where these lay in the open the tracks were camouflaged with boarding, branches and twig wattles. But everything was quiet enough; on the ridges the artillery duel had been growling all morning, and the prisoners could look back to the white shell puffs breaking along the second line of hills.

At noon they reached what appeared to be a permanent camp of the Germans, and laid by the roadside by a big base hospital. The imperial standard flapped lazily from a stone château a half mile further on.

It was the first real kaiser flag that Jimmy May had seen and he watched it curiously. "Tolly, I guess we're a long, long way from home," he muttered. "Maybe old Bill himself hangs out there!"

"I ain't worryin' about Bill—what I want is to eat—and to wash my feet, Jimmy."

Jimmy, himself, had been limping the last few miles. The little bronze cross was cutting into his ankle, but he heroically tried to forget the pain. The other American prisoner lounged nearer. The discipline had been a bit relaxed,

and the eleven Frenchmen were talking. The only one who spoke English at all, joined them presently.

"Mes amis," he began, "we are to take that train down there very soon. I think it is to be the main prison camp at Gustrow in Mecklenburg for us. After that—" he shrugged—"what did you do in America?"

"Do?" queried Jimmy, "the army—that's all. Before that, in school—and I played left field on the town team, Frenchie!"

The *chasseur* looked perplexed. He couldn't understand the Sammies' ever hopeful joshing. But Jimmy May was telling the truth. The German sergeant was sauntering nearer to listen.

"Be careful when they register you for work," whispered the young Frenchman. "I heard the Americans were going to the salt mines."

He turned and sat down with his group. Jimmy was silent. He had heard of the dreaded salt mine gangs where prisoners whom the Germans particularly hated were sent. He suddenly felt a new problem, grim and terrible, arising in his young life: and he thought worriedly of his

mother in far-off America. He wondered when he would get word to her of his fate, if ever. And while he was dispiritedly pondering it, the sergeant growled:

"Auf!"

And down the dusty road past the motor truck line the weary prisoners legged it again—nothing to eat all day save the black bread and coffee. They were marched into a wire-inclosed little railroad siding where a dirty line of freight cars lay; and here, sitting alongside of one that held a dozen French prisoners, they had more black bread and turnip soup—miserably thin and bitter soup. Tolliver dumped his in the cinders.

"Not hungry enough yet, Jimmy. I'll gnaw away on this bread, or what-you-call-it. Oh, for the old bully beef and real coffee, eh?"

A red-faced officer came along, asked for the new prisoners, and the sergeant gave him their cards. Then the train officer growled for them to get aboard, and the fourteen piled up in the dirty cattle car. Jimmy sighed and sat down. It was bad business—the glory of war was far from his ardent soul.

"But all right," he grumbled, "it's all for

home folks, Tolly! But it seems like a bad dream, doesn't it to you?"

Then with a jar and a jerk the little train pulled off. There was but one car of prisoners; the others appeared loaded with German troops, going back, perhaps, to some rest or reorganization camp, for they appeared to be men stupid with fatigue, ragged, dirty and sullen.

"Say," grumbled the artillerymen, "those guys look worse off than we do, don't they?"

"They've been in a big milling, somewhere," agreed Jimmy. "I guess they're those Bavarians that our fellows licked to a finish last week up in the Reims sector. Reckon they love us Sammies, eh?"

The train crawled on northwestwardly. Jimmy and Tolliver had been gloomily admitting the impossibility of escape. The car gave them open views of the rolling country, but it was alive everywhere with enemy camps, trains and stations, and a lone Yankee would have no chance of either concealment or travel. The cars rattled and creaked, and finally, toiling up a ravine among higher hills, stopped altogether with a jar. After a wait back came the sergeant of

the prison guard. He opened the slatted door.

"Drunten!" he ordered, indicating that they should tumble out and go forward. Five cars up, passing the troops staring out the windows, the prisoners saw that the rail had spread and one of the coaches had ground its wheels down in the ties. Some workers were already bringing jacks, and the sergeant kicked out a dozen shovels for the captives. Then he ordered them to work in digging under the displaced track while the Germans labored with the derailed car.

Jimmy swung his shovel down in the cinders. There was nothing for it but work with the bayonets of the guards at their backs. For two hours the prisoners and the railroad troops worked together; and then, while the little engine shunted the car slowly away from the spread rail, the prisoners were permitted to climb back on the embankment and rest. Dog-tired and weak they were from fasting, and Jimmy closed his eyes, stretched on the dusty grass. Then he opened them, and his glance went to the car tops.

There was something he hadn't noticed from the ground! Every car top was camouflaged rudely; painted in gray and yellow daubs, and

over and among these were laid branches with lifeless leaves still clinging. He saw now that the dummy engine was even more elaborately dressed, and that in some spots the branch camouflage was much higher than in others.

Rube Tolliver was watching the train top also. "Airplanes must be workin' this line," he grunted. "I reckon they do try to mess up the communications a bit. Well, somehow, it wouldn't be so bad if—it might be better'n them salt mines, Jimmy!"

Jimmy was still for a time. "Say," he muttered presently, "Rube, would you take a chance?"

"Chance?"

"A fellow—if he could get to the car tops, could crawl under some of that stuff. It'll be dark in an hour. If——"

"Crazy!" growled Rube. "If we got off we'd be in Germany!"

"I don't care. A chance is a chance. These fellows ain't payin' much attention now. And our prison car—it's got a lot of thick stuff on it, Rube. Once a fellow was under, and laid tight——"

"Raus!" the work sergeant was saying to the Frenchmen down the bank. The weary captives arose and shambled back on the track. The guards watched them pass. At the prisoners' car the Frenchmen began to clamber in. Rube and Jimmy were near the last. Rube's eyes went covertly at the nearest guard leaning sleepily on his rifle.

"Can't be done," he muttered. "Awful chance, Jimmy!"

Jimmy was swinging up to the door; he had really given it up himself with the sentry not twenty feet away. And just as he got his knee on the car floor, the engine gave a sudden terrific jerk on the train. The crowding prisoners humped and stumbled all around Corporal May. Forward an officer had been hurled violently off the steps. The guard muttered and stared, for an instant his back to the prisoners. Jimmy turned his head; every Boche was watching the accident, listening to the swearing *oberlieutenant.*

"Hist!" whispered Jimmy, and with a cat-like climb up the slatted car side, a lunge and a squirm, he lay out flat on the roof, under the dry rustling leaves of the camouflage. Another

instant and a sweating body lunged in beside him and lay still. They heard, above the jar and rattle of the train, and the angry voices down the track, a surprised mutter below among the Frenchmen. And another instant the car door was violently slammed and the guards went forward.

Still as death the two Sammies lay, wondering if they dared draw their legs closer up under the leafy concealment. And in another moment the little train went jerking up the ravine, a cloud of smoke pouring back, and cinders rattling down over the fugitives.

"Done it!" gasped Tolliver. "May get shot for this, bucky—but we're here!"

"There are four guards in the car," whispered Jimmy, "but I don't think any are on top. We got to drop off this, though, before we strike any station. After that——"

Jimmy stopped; he couldn't think after that. But they would be free for a time, hungry, starving, on the soil of the enemy, but free men for an hour. The roar and rattle of the train allowed them to move about and converse. They knew the French prisoners, just under them,

must be aware of the escape; the guards had been too much absorbed in the officer's accident to count the captives as they clambered in. But, sooner or later, they would discover that the two Yankees were missing.

Jimmy crawled around under the camouflage branches so that he could look out on the passing landscape.

"Got to be done soon, Tolly," he muttered, "before the first stop."

"Can't do a thing but take to the hills and game it out long as we can," grunted Rube. "I suppose there are French people in this section who'd help us if they dared."

Jimmy gloomily watched the country. The train was laboring up a long grade, more slowly all the time. And presently it came to a jarring stop out among some quiet fields with the sun over the low wooded hills to westward. Jimmy turned to his comrade; this was bad—they would be discovered if they tried to jump from the train when it was still, for the guards would detect any untoward sound. But the silence now grew rather curious. Save for weary mutterings in the prisoners' car nothing stirred, after

a few orders up forward. Peering cautiously over the car top and towards the engine, Jimmy saw a trio of German officers out—and they were watching the sky westward. Then suddenly, at an exclamation from one, they all dodged in close to the train.

Jimmy listened to the quiet summer peace. And suddenly Rube Tolliver nudged his shoulder. "Listen," he whispered. "Get that, boy?"

It seemed that a great nest of bees had arisen over the hills to the northwest. Against the yellow sky the soldiers saw a black slit, then another, and two more came up swiftly from due north. The roar of the motors broke out menacingly. No need for guessing now!

Every man on the troop train, Germans and prisoners alike, knew that it was a squadron of allied bombing airplanes evidently returning from some raid on the great military depots in the Metz area.

They knew, too, that, with the sun at their backs and the train locomotive still pouring a black cloud from its stack, every keen-eyed hawk of the sky must spot their location. The airplanes had dived instantly when they came over

the ridge, and now began to maneuver in a wide circle, apparently without fear from any anti-aircraft gun in this section.

"Spotted us," muttered Tolliver. "See that leader swooping low to the left—and they're all stringing out to come over this outfit not a thousand feet up—no, it ain't five hundred!"

They heard a stir and a clamor in the prison car. The men cooped there could not see the Allied raiders, but they could hear the deadly beat of the motors. Some broke into cries and jeers, and the guards shouted hoarsely for silence. Further up the troop cars were held to iron discipline, in a hope that the train might escape observation under its camouflaged top. But Jimmy and Rube Tolliver, crouched under the leafy concealment, knew better. The aerial patrol had them dead to rights, unprotected and helpless.

"Jimmy," whispered Rube, "we got to lie here and take this!"

"We got to take a chance. If we jumped and ran the guards would shoot before we got ten yards. No, wait—for the bust-up!"

Just then there came the crash of some awak-

ening gun a mile distant along the railroad, then another and another, as the archies discovered the airplanes which had lowered for the attack. Jimmy saw the first machine rushing from a point dead ahead of the train down upon them, low—terribly low, it appeared. He dodged back breathlessly, and then came the roar of a bomb ahead, mingling with the snarl of the airplane's engine as it rushed over them. Then another explosion shook the earth nearer. Dodging his head out again, Jimmy saw the right-of-way ahead was buried in smoke and dust. And far above this came the second bomber square on the trail of the leader.

"Zoom!" went his bomb five cars this side of the locomotive. It struck not ten feet from the train and blew the entire side in. A frightened shout ran up and down the whole troop train. Men came leaping from each side and scattering up the bank. Two more terrific crashes broke ahead, one of them a fair hit. Jimmy and Rube had sprung to their feet now. A wild howling from guards and prisoners alike came from the locked car. Just over it now Jimmy saw a great gray biplane speed above the

smoke. He even could see the hooded pilot watching down. Then the bomb fell like a plummet. Jimmy leaped far to the left, and he heard Tolliver strike beside him. But the bomber had missed his prey, luckily for the cooped Frenchmen. The explosive blew out a fountain of dirt on the other side. The two Sammies were charging up a slope, through some little trees and then into a scrawny grain field. Behind them came other quick explosions. The train was almost buried in huge brown patches of dust and smoke, and from under this, everywhere, frightened soldiers were streaming.

The distant roar of the archies came now through the lessening racket of the bombs. Off to the south Jimmy saw the string of air-men looming up again to their safe altitude to pass the guns. The last of them let a bomb go that fell harmlessly beyond the last car. But the train was a blazing shambles—it had been struck in five places on either side of the prisoners' car in the center.

As the two panting Sammies reached the far side of the field they saw that their fellow-prisoners had escaped harm. Dark figures were

swarming around the train; officers were shouting, bringing the mob back to discipline, seeking out the killed and wounded.

"No place for us!" gasped Jimmy. "Come on! Up in that vineyard and sneak low!"

They were among low, knotted grape vines now, stumbling on. The anti-aircraft guns were still volleying shrapnel into the sky as the raiders disappeared into the dusk. Jimmy and Tolliver climbed a stone fence, crossed a road and climbed among some trees on a higher ride. Dog-tired and weak, they sank down to breathe. Jimmy knew his hidden cross of war was digging blood out of his ankle under the tight legging. But he wouldn't take a chance on removing it yet.

He got up and limped after Tolliver into a cleared pasture of the desolate hills. A rough, wooded country stretched north and east. They stared at it in the deep twilight. It was very still save for a final bark of one of the archies after the air-men who had sped on by now many miles to the southwest.

"Great work, that!" said Jimmy. "Hope it was some of our Americans! Some day I'd like

to tell 'em how completely they walloped that troop train—and by beautiful luck didn't hit the prisoners!"

"But it makes you lonesome to see 'em go!" muttered Tolliver. "Awful lonesome, for you and me, Jimmy."

"But—" muttered Jimmy—"they ain't all gone yet! There comes a plane! See, slipping lower back on us! Maybe it's a Boche, though!"

They could just make it out in the dusk. Then Jimmy gasped with surprise, for the machine was winging down silently in a long slope. The soldiers saw the last light on its gray wings as it careened and slipped behind the trees not a half mile from them.

"Landed!" muttered Jimmy. "Now what? It can't be a Boche! No—one of our fellows, and they winged him. Forced landing, and he volplaned around and down to get away from their defense line. Fat chance he's got, Tolly!"

"Maybe it's only engine trouble—and maybe, in the dusk, they didn't see him. Say, maybe we could help him out, Jimmy!"

"Right," gasped Jimmy, limping up and on. "Got to help if we can!"

And, forgetting their own desperate plight, the two Sammies set off through the trees in the direction of the lost bird-man. They came out in a little clearing upon which they saw the machine. And a young American aviator had just unstrapped the dead body of his bomber and machine-gun fighter from the rear seat and laid him out silently on the grass. He didn't even notice the two soldier-fugitives when they stopped behind him.

CHAPTER XI

THE MEANING OF THE CROIX DE GUERRE

CORPORAL MAY walked on quietly, and ten paces from the silent airman, who was gazing down at his dead comrade, he spoke softly. The aviator whirled about, made a motion as if to draw a pistol, then stopped to stare at the two American soldiers.

"Friends, sir," muttered Jimmy. "We saw you land here."

"You?" gasped the young officer. "How on earth——"

"Prisoners, sir—just escaped from that German troop train which your squadron bombed back there. Can we help you, sir?"

The airman stared incredulously. "Prisoners —and we bombed you? That's tragic—bombed our own fellows!"

"You didn't. There was but one car of prisoners—and it wasn't touched. You tore the train up pretty bad, though."

"Good. It was just a lucky chance. We were returning from a raid on their supply stations in the Metz area. And the archies got me with shrapnel. Killed my machine-gun man —and put some bullets into my motor that stopped it somehow or other." He looked down at his dead companion. "Poor Barton!—he was good as they come. You will help me carry him to that thicket? The best we can do is a soldier's burial."

"There is none better—for a fighting man, sir —is there?"

"You're right, Corporal," said the aviator with a faint smile. "The best way to go—fighting it out. Come on—there's little time."

Slowly the three carried the body of the air fighter ten yards back into the little grove. It was dark when they dug and scooped a shallow grave for the soldier of America. Some broken boards, which Tolliver found back by a road running down the farther slope where there had been a building of some sort, served as picks and shovels. But it was hard and long work. When they had reverently laid the dead aviator

in the excavation, Jimmy looked up to his silent companions.

"I used to know an old Confederate veteran back home, sir—in Louisiana, he lived—who told me that in the Civil War they used to bury their boys lying on their sides—an arm up over their faces. To keep the dirt away a bit, sir—and because it was just the way a soldier would sleep out in the open most naturally. This old Confederate thought it was right and fine to be laid that way when a fellow was buried out in the open, you see."

"Yes?" said the officer, "Barton was a Southern boy—his people fought in the old war, too. So, as the old Confederate would have had it, he shall rest."

When the silent little task was done the lieutenant muttered a last good-by to his comrade's resting place, and the three stole back to the quiet hill field where the biplane lay. Then the aviator whispered of his plans. He was Flight Commander Denison of a bombing squadron of the American air forces, and this was his third foray over this sector of the enemy's land. He knew the country well on the way back to the

front lines; and he shook his head at the idea that the fugitives could get through them.

"It seems certain that the Germans did not see me land just here—that high ridge concealed the last slant I took, perhaps. They probably think I landed in the more level places across the valley. I took a chance on planing down on this ridge for that very reason."

"Doesn't seem to be any one around here, sir—that's a fact," answered Jimmy. "They'd have been at us before this. It's about a mile back to the wrecked train, and I suppose that affair has taken their interest for a time. Maybe they haven't missed Tolliver and myself yet."

The aviator was busied about his engine. The gray planes were hardly visible in the dark, and the trio of fugitives talked in whispers. They might have some hours to consider the situation before discovery. The airman told Jimmy it was some twelve miles to the nearest allied position in a direct line. After awhile he came crawling from the motor.

"Nothing to it!" he whispered. "A shrapnel bullet plugged into the copper tubing leading to my carburetor—a glancing swipe that bent

the tube in without breaking it a bit. Boys, I will have that machine in the air within an hour!"

"Bully, sir!" whispered Jimmy back, joyful himself at the young officer's jubilance. "And we'll go sneak along that road each way, acting as patrols. If any Boche comes near this ridge we'll start him on a chase away from this place."

"Yes? And you, corporal?"

"Oh, well! They'd get us anyhow in the end! And you, sir—the life or freedom of an airman is much more valuable than a couple of doughboys like us. It's for home folks we're thinking, sir!"

"You're right." Lieutenant Denison laughed softly. "But it's fine of you to see it so clearly. All right—save me if you can—for the folks back home! But I want to tell you—I can take one of you back in Barton's seat. *One* of you, mind!"

In the dark there was silence. Two hungry, ragged doughboys stood watching the stars over the hills. One of them could go back to freedom and to duty, could he? And the other—to a German prison, or to death!

Jimmy May knew that Tolliver was staring at

him in the dark. Each knew what the other was thinking. Freedom—life—was sweet; but there was his bunky, the fellow each had soldiered with from the Sonora dust and mesquite to the gas-drenched fields of France.

Tolliver was the first to speak. He did not address Jimmy, but the officer, and in a casual, respectful, line-of-duty voice.

"We'll go back, sir—and lay up along the road. We've no weapons, but if, when your motor starts, any Boche comes dubbing up to this hill, Corporal May and I'll lace into him—into a dozen of 'em."

"Very well, sir. I think the plane is all right, when I open that feed pipe again. When you hear the motor, get to me quick as you can. I can carry one, in Barton's seat—sorry that is all."

The two doughboys hiked silently off in the dark.

"Say," muttered Tolliver presently, "I like that chap—all business. Nothin' mushy about him. That's right—the best man must be saved first. Him, first, of course. Then you, Jimmy—you're worth a squad of me!"

"Cut this talk," retorted Jimmy. "Me—I'm your superior officer, Tolly. I never like to remind one of the old bunch of that—but I most generally never have to. Now, we ain't going to argue this. You get in that old bus with Lieutenant Denison—that's all!"

"Not on your life!"

Tolliver stopped in the road when the two came out of the protecting trees. The starlight showed each man to the other dimly. There was not a sound, not a light anywhere in the night. The world war might have been on another planet as far as these two were concerned. But one fellow would go back to the great adventure and play his part for America, and the other to a Hunnish prison or to death. It was as simple as could be; so simple that Jimmy sat down on the grassy bank listening quietly for the snarl of the motor which would awaken every patrol in the district. The man who was going back to the fighting line would have to dash at once for the machine and be off, so there was little time to talk. Corporal May felt a stinging little pain down inside his shoe, and slowly unlaced his legging until he could take the *Croix de*

Guerre away from the bruised flesh. Anyhow, he was going to save that from the Huns.

"Say, Rube, I want you to take this back—turn it in to the regimental adjutant so that—if anything happens—it'll go back to my mother."

"G'wan," grunted Tolliver, "what you take me for, anyhow?"

"I'm going to stay, Rube. See here. Do you think a fellow who'd won the cross of war could do anything else?"

"G'wan!" repeated Rube. "Do you think a guy that had soldiered with you, Jimmy, for three years, and never got no medal, could do anything else?"

"Oh, you make me tired!" muttered Jimmy. He got up and crossed the road ditch to his bunky. "Say, Rube—back in Michigan, who you got there?"

"Me? I'm married."

"*Married?* Well, for the love of Mike!—you never told any one in B Company!"

"No. What for? But I got a wife and a little kid back on a little farm. They get all my pay, Jimmy—you know I always was the

broke guy of B Company. We were just kids ourselves—Minnie and me—and once we had a little spat, and I got mad and enlisted. Well, there you are! We got all over that, but I was in the Army! Not sorry, either—she nor me. She's just great as can be."

"You're going back," muttered Jimmy. "Come now!"

"I heard you tell of your mother, Jimmy. I reckon she——"

"Yes," said Jimmy, eagerly starting to his bunky in the dark. "If she was here she'd sort of laugh at the idea that there was any doubt about what I was to do! She's army people—way back—always have been. My dad was colonel of our regiment once!"

"Thunder!" murmured Rube, "and you never told any one *that!*"

"What's the use? But you see all this makes it so I got but one choice—this, and besides that—winning the Cross of War! What'd the French think of me, anyhow—or President Wilson, or any folks back home?"

"What'd my kid wife think of me, then?"

"She'll never know. Besides it's her we got to think about. That's it, and——"

On the still night broke a sudden loud crash which slowly lessened to an even purring of the airplane motor a hundred yards away. Jimmy whirled quickly to the woods. "There, now! That racket will stir every Boche in miles! Rube!"

Rube was stumbling along after him. "Say," he growled, "we'll leave it to this aviation officer—just cold reason—just who's the best man to get away with him!"

"I guess we won't! Reason—nothing! I wouldn't have a chance to make good! Reason can't settle everything—the Cross of War means just a little bit more!"

"Oh, Jimmy!" Rube kept grumbling away at him as the two dashed out of the thickets upon the little plateau upon which the airplane lay poised and humming. "Say, Jimmy, I won't stand for this! I'll make it a gamble with you! —we'll draw straws, the short one loses!"

"Quick!" Jimmy was touching the aviator's arm in the darkness. "This chap's never been in

an airplane; I haven't either, for that matter! But, get him in, sir!"

"That seat, sir—behind." The aviator was adjusting the leather straps about the after seat where the observer-machine-gun man was placed. Then he looked curiously at the two silent Sammies.

"Well, sir?" He paused. "I suppose you have been trying to settle this affair. And being American soldiers you have been quarreling as to who will go with me, each asking the other chap."

"Here, sir," blurted Tolliver, solemnly. "We tried to reason it out—but the Corporal, sir—he won't listen to reason! I told him the best man of us—best for the Army, sir—ought to be back there in the fighting line. That's Corporal May, sir!"

"And I——" put in Corporal Jimmy. "Well, all the argument I got is *this*—and I want you to take it back with you, sir!"

In the dim starlight he thrust, under the aviator's nose, the *Croix de Guerre.*

Above the motor's clatter Jimmy could see

that the young airman was muttering something, with awkward hurriedness.

"Rube," cried Jimmy, "in with you; this is no time for a gabfest again!" Then he turned, bending close to the aviator. "My cross, sir—to the regimental headquarters—for me."

Big Rube Tolliver was also trying to break into the conversation, but Jimmy thrust him back. "You decide this, sir! My bunky proposed that once, and I refused. But I won the war cross, and you understand a fellow's got to carry on after that!"

"It ain't right," protested Tolliver, "it ain't in reason!"

"You lose," commanded the birdman with a laugh. "There's some things can't be reasoned! In with you, sir!" Then he turned to Corporal May, and thrust a hand out of his glove. "Good-by—good luck—God bless you!"

He had vaulted to the machine and turned to show Tolliver the observer's seat and to strap him in, all the time shouting some instructions to the infantryman. Then he swung to the pilot's seat.

Big Rube Tolliver leaned unsteadily forward,

reaching to grasp Jimmy's hand. He was trying to say something, but his husky voice did not carry above the motor's roaring. And suddenly, with a slip forward over the short, level grass, then a fling gracefully into swifter speed, the biplane sped on, rising a bit until Jimmy saw its gray wings for a moment like a blur against the trees. Then it was lost against the starlight, flinging back to earth a scornful and jubilant song to the Boches over German land.

Jimmy May stood upright in sheer admiration for a time. Then he walked slowly to the brow of the hill, staring off to the south. He could hear the purring of the airplane far and high now, and suddenly he remembered how close his friends were over there—and how hopelessly far to him!

Why, in a few minutes, Lieutenant Denison and Tolliver would be over the German lines, over the French and American lines, and seeking for his airdrome markings for the safe descent. Twelve miles off there!—why, it was nothing!

But twelve miles to a lone and unarmed Sammie, with thousands of foemen all around him!

Suddenly Jimmy felt desperately tired again and hungry; the events of the last forty-eight hours had him reeling on his feet.

"The Boches'll be scouting around this ridge sure now," he muttered, "and first I'm going to make a get-away far enough to crawl under some shelter and sleep! Sleep—oh, boy!—a sleep!"

He crept and floundered on, keeping to the thick brush above the road, and in the densest tangle he could find he crept far under and stretched himself out on the earth.

"Sure got a big sleep coming," he muttered, and drowsed off into absolute forgetfulness of war and hunger and exhaustion.

CHAPTER XII

FOLLOWING THE BOCHE TO BATTLE

IT seemed no time at all until Jimmy stirred weariedly, conscious that something was going on about him. He opened his eyes slowly to stare into the thickets above him. Then he felt the drip of rain from the leaves upon his cheek. Lame and aching in every bone from his night upon the ground, he sat up. The dark was still intense, but he felt he ought to be making some plan of escape, if possible, before the dawn. It was some moments ere his drowsy mind called back all the events since his capture. And when it did he felt his former ravenous hunger, and then that inside his shirt was an emergency ration of chocolate and hard bread that the aviator had given him. He had better eat that, at least, before the Germans picked him up again. So he sat in the drizzle and dark and munched it all. Then he was very thirsty and sucked away at some of the dripping leaves,

and at last crawled out and stood upright. Presently he began to wonder again what had awakened him out of his dog-tired sleep.

"Guess I'll have to wait for daylight to move anywhere," he thought. "Just now one place is good as another."

So he drowsed away again, sitting on the wet grass in the drizzle. Then he heard that mysterious stirring again, and started up. It was in the thickets quite near him this time. Jimmy strained his eyes watching the spot. A lightening seemed to be coming at last over the rainy hills. The fugitive determined to see what was near him, so he crept noiselessly on. Presently he was sure he saw a form against the brush, and he heard the sounds clearer. Down he dropped and crawled on. And there, not ten feet distant, he discovered a cow peacefully reaching around at the grasses!

Jimmy laughed aloud in his relief. He got up, felt forward and touched the animal's damp nose. He found now she was tethered by a short line. He scratched her head; some good old friendly family cow, she was, and after her welcome she went on at her breakfast.

Jimmy sat down and studied the matter. A cow concealed away up on this brushy, rough ridge of the war zone hills? Then she was not a German cow, he reasoned. A refugee, contraband cow, indeed, and some one, not friendly to the Boches, certainly must care for her.

When the rainy dawn came Jimmy was squatting in the warm and drier spot where the cow had slept that night, watching her comfortingly. Over the hilltops the mists were drifting, and now his ears began to pick up the rumble of the guns again far to the southwest and he dispiritedly remembered the war once more.

"Shucks!" he murmured. "If I had a bucket, me for the milk!"

The airman's chocolate ration had been gone some hours ago, and now with the growing rumble of the battle of nations coming to his ears, Jimmy was more hungrily intent on this cow of France than he was the kaiser. And when the light grew better, looking down in the muddy grass Jimmy saw footprints. They were not his own and they were made before the night's rain. He got up and followed them carefully back, as

fascinated as Robinson Crusoe on his cannibal island.

"Kids," he muttered, "sure as shooting! They come up and milk their cow on the quiet! Now, I'll bet anything——"

The rest of Corporal May's remark was lost partly in a new deep roar of the distant guns, as if the battle was hitching up along a wider and nearer front, and partly a frightened exclamation just ahead of him in the path.

For there was a small boy in a dirty blue blouse, carrying an earthenware flagon and a big tin cup; he had turned as if about to run and then stopped defiantly.

"Mon ami!" gasped Jimmy hurriedly. "Don't go! I am *le Sammee!"*

The boy stared the harder, then he cried out sharply. Jimmy pointed at himself, the cow, the hills, the far battlefront, and then pulled out his tattered phrase-book, which the Boche guards had left to him.

"Looky here—*garçon!"* Jimmy tapped his khaki breast and opened wide his arms. "How about some *du lait* from *le cow?* Get me—

American? Friend—*Ami!* Hi, kid—understand?"

A wondering smile came from the boy. Then he jumped forward, tapped Jimmy's sleeve and began to pour forth a string of words all of which were lost on the damp and hungry Corporal. The *garçon* pointed and whispered. Then with a final exclamation he sat down and began to milk his cow, pouring the foamy cupfuls into the jar after handing the first one to Jimmy. He seemed fascinated at the way that warm milk slid down the Yankee's throat.

"Hold on," said Jimmy, "you've got your cow hid out, and you need this milk at home for the family—ain't that right? Well, I got enough, then! Go to it, kid!"

So he refused any more, and waited until the cow was milked. Then he listened to the boy mutter. Apparently he had to be off at once. Jimmy guarded the milk while the lad took his cow down the ridge to water, it seemed, and then brought her back to be tethered deeper in the thickets. Then, when the young milkman took his flagon and started away, Jimmy followed watchfully. The lad seemed worried by

this; and by his inability to speak a word of English. Finally he stopped Jimmy and pointed. Through the lifting fog Jimmy could see far down in a wooded valley. A road showed here and there, and along it now Corporal May saw dense columns of gray-clad infantry winding on under the fog. He whistled. The lad looked expectantly at him; then he pointed far back on the road.

Field-guns! Scores of them, horse-drawn, and motor-propelled, and on another road across the valley Jimmy saw other and heavier cannon trundling slowly on, now revealed, now hidden to his eyes.

The boy spoke rapidly and pointed southward and swept his arms wide. Jimmy understood that the movement had been going on all night. He understood what it meant—an immense concentration was taking place under the protection of the line of hills. When the sun came out, undoubtedly the entire troop movement would vanish from sight in the wooded valley secure from the allied scouts of the air!

"That's it," muttered Jimmy, "getting ready for a surprise drive on us. That's why the gun-

fire has been getting bigger all night. And the infantry and mobile artillery are being slipped up for a regular smash on us. Regular old Boche trick—same thing they pulled in Picardy and on the British in March. And they're going to start it on the Americans now! All under cover, not a column will move when the fog gets off the hills!"

The French lad had listened to Jimmy muttering away. Then he pointed at Jimmy's uniform, and motioned for him to keep to the brush. Then he took his milk and scrambled down the steep path. Jimmy crawled out under the thickets and lay still. He could hear the chuffing motors faintly, but considering the thousands of enemies on the march, their stillness was remarkable.

Corporal May pondered the situation. He wanted above all things that the American command might know of this developing attack. He thought now less of his peril than of absorbing interest in the war game below. And while he was studying it despondently his little friend came slipping back through the fog. In a neat package he had a loaf of war bread, some strips

of salt meat and soft cheese. And he unrolled before Jimmy a worn, soiled workman's blouse and trousers. Then he shrugged, pointed back in the woods. Evidently he feared to have the American down in the valley. Jimmy understood. It might mean death for the French family if they sheltered an escaped prisoner; and besides, Jimmy would certainly be recaptured sooner or later if he went near any house or camp.

But he took the little presents gratefully, making up his mind that he would carry the peasant's clothes along, but he had no mind to don them. He couldn't pass himself anywhere for a Frenchman or German, he knew; for "American" was written all over Corporal May in his accent, walk and countenance. If he tried to go on in the borrowed clothes he would be taken for a spy, undoubtedly.

"My Uncle Sammy's duds'll have to do," he smiled at the lad; "but all right—*merci, le garcon!* I'm on my way! And if a racket starts on the front my chance of getting through may be better than if it's quiet. Anyhow, I'll take

a chance! Good luck, kid—to you and the folks, not forgetting your old brindle bossy!"

And he seized up his packages, and then the French boy's hands. They smiled at each other a moment.

"Vive les Allies!" whispered the boy of France.

"Vive la France!" retorted Jimmy. *"Vive la victoire-er,* and all of it! All to the candy, and *raus* mit der Boches! Get that?"

Then he turned and went back in the deep brush, leaving the lad lifting a warning hand. On the near road below him Jimmy saw a Uhlan patrol riding slowly down the valley. Climbing higher among the rocks, Jimmy set off cautiously, following the German Army on its way to battle.

"Not that the Crown Prince'll be cheered to have me," muttered Corporal May, "but I may as well go this way as the other. Cheer up, Wilhelm, you'll be hiking back this road yourself some day! You bet!—and in a hurry—rather a hurry! You won't enjoy it much as I do now!"

For Jimmy began to feel much better. His

damp clothes were drying, and after he had eaten a third of his lunch packet he was pleased to observe that the clouds settled thickly on the hilltops. When the rocky woodlands gave way to open places he scouted cautiously about, keeping to what cover offered. He knew, sooner or later, as he neared the fighting front, that the hills would be taken up with artillery stations and observation posts. The heavy gunfire was continuous off to his right; and when he came to where a lateral little valley cut in from the main one where the troop roads lay, he was not surprised to hear, suddenly, the awakening thunder of guns not a mile from him. He saw the smoke presently on a rugged spur across the lateral valley, much higher than where he stood.

"Sure!" muttered Jimmy, "opening up here now, and I guess it's me to lay up awhile!"

For down in the open he saw a field railway curving in which served the big guns on the further slope. The whole line of hills seemed to be jarring with the cannonade—it was the biggest racket that Jimmy had yet heard. From all the high spurs ahead the Germans were hurl-

ing immense shells upon his comrades many miles beyond this line.

And as Jimmy watched the drift of fog and smoke, suddenly there broke a gray patch ahead of him in the little valley, enveloping a section of the field railroad. A fountain of dirt went up.

"Ranged 'em right!" chuckled Corporal May. "That's a big one from home,—yes, and there's another just over that redoubt on the left! Atta boy!—Oh, you Yankee guns off there!"

He snuggled down among the rocks and watched. The American high-angle fire grew more frequent. All along the ridge and down on the rear slopes where the Germans were concentrated, the heavy guns of the boys from home were dropping shell after shell. Twice Jimmy saw allied aviators dimly through the misty scud beyond the hills. Presently a shell came with the roar of an express train over his head and struck back in the timber. It jarred Jimmy May to his teeth. He got up and dusted his cothes and sat down again.

"What's the use?" he said. "One place is good as another. I got to wait till dark and then get past the big gun stations. But then—if I do

that—there'll be about four lines of trenches, I reckon; and if the Boches don't get me, the Sammies will! But I got one square meal ahead of me yet, so I'll stick up close to home as a fellow can."

And all day, hidden on the back ridge, Corporal May watched the smoky and foggy hills ahead of him; when dusk came the American shells were lurid blotches exploding on the German lines, and at every one Jimmy thrilled as if a rough friend was greeting him. At dusk he ate the rest of his grub, drank rain water from a puddle on a stump and then started down in a detour around the main German position.

"Here goes," he murmured, "if I got any chance at all it'll have to be just ahead of their reserve infantry, for they'll certainly be shoving 'em up here to-night."

In the rainy dark he crossed an ammunition train railroad, slipped into a creek bed and began to wade knee-deep. He discovered a bridge with a sentry post on it, but crawled under and past it undiscovered. Then he saw open country lit everywhere by dull shell bursts, and beyond that uncanny white flares. It was an in-

ferno of noise and trembling earth, and Jimmy considered it gravely.

"The infantry are at it," he thought. "Maybe our gang is coming!" He stood up in the dark creek bed and waved a hand jubilantly: "Come on, you Yanks! I'll meet you halfway!"

CHAPTER XIII

FOR THE FOLKS AT HOME

CORPORAL JIMMY MAY, wading on the rocks, slowly felt the creek current higher and fiercer over his knees. He had a hand up to the overhanging limbs trying to steady himself and watch the reddish blurs against the dark off to his right and left as well as just ahead. He felt, rather than saw, that the rough ridges which gave birth to this dashing rivulet had fallen away and a gentle terrain spread beyond. He was sure of it when, looking behind him, he distinctly saw the bursts from the German guns taking a rough, irregular line as far as he could distinguish them. This crest above the Marne was a veritable fortress which hurled its iron hail over the heads of the Boches in their trenches out to the fighting line. Ahead of him for miles the dark was lit by the gunfire of his own comrades, but he was doggedly determined to keep

on, and if he was recaptured it would be near to "home" as he could make it.

So he stumbled and waded, listening and watching for any sign of the enemy. Once, along the bank, there were few trees, and the smell of stables came to him. He could just make out irregular humps and objects, and guessed it was a horse artillery depot or an ambulance station sheltered a bit by a bend of the creek under a steeper bank. But Jimmy kept boldly on past this undiscovered, to get into the fringe of trees again. Then, when he felt he was at last making progress, he suddenly stumbled, lost his hold on a limb, and a moment more was swimming in a rush of water. He had come to the intersection of a much larger stream and deeper. But he swiftly decided to strike out for the unknown shore. One way was good as another to a lost soldier in the dark of the enemy's land.

So he swam on with the roughening current, watching the red blur of shells burst through distant trees. Then he was swept under a steep bank, and on in complete darkness. Some bulky object finally loomed up close to his left and he

went for it. But as his hand touched an iron bound corner he gasped, then swung silently under the overhang of a big barge, found a footing on the braces of what appeared to be a great crude rudder, and there he hung, thinking it over.

It was a barge all right, moored to the bank. Over the edge hung a tarpaulin, and beyond this barge was another with a shed roof. He saw a faint blur there and made it out to be a man with a lantern. Up on the bank he discovered another light, and raising cautiously on the line that moored the boat to the shore, he saw it was a German officer who appeared to be studying a paper by the aid of a flashlight.

"None of my business!" murmured Jimmy, and crept back to his roost on the rudder post bracing. "I'll just wait a bit for 'em to settle down."

So he folded himself up clammily just above the water, and wondered casually what would happen if the American artillery, just by accident, dropped a six-incher on this old tub. It was some comfort to reflect that it would be more costly for the Boches than the Sammies, at

any rate. Looking back upstream, he saw the dim blotches along the ridge where the German heavy guns were booming.

But shortly he heard voices on the bank. Orders shouted out, and a stirring. The mooring line splashed heavily from the shore and began to snake up the barge side. And Jimmy felt a slow creak of the rudder post at his back. He dodged around like a cat. But nothing appeared. The big wooden rudder merely heaved off a bit.

But the German barge fleet was swinging off!

To say that Corporal May was startled is mild. For an instant he thought of diving off, and then he remembered that the Germans could not possibly see him where he hung—and perhaps, yes—surely!—this supply boat would move on closer to the battle front. It was just for that purpose, and it was loaded deep.

"Fine," muttered Jimmy. "I'll quit this ark when I have to!"

He didn't know what sort of power was pulling the four barges. From his roost nothing was visible but dark water and shore and the fire-spitting crest of hills which he was leaving. And

for nearly an hour he sat, the rudder groaning by his side in its bracing, and the water bubbling up around Jimmy's shoulders. Once they slid under a bridge and he saw an idling patrol. Then a camp which he identified by faint glows in dugout doors on the low hills.

"Then I'm getting up front," argued Jimmy, "but they won't hook this junk on much longer. She'll be getting too close to our 75's for comfort."

Twice, indeed, out on the wooded bank, shells struck and exploded with startling savagery. One showered dirt far over the water. Corporal Jimmy scratched his wet head; he would have to quit this Boche free excursion some time, but he wanted to beat his way far as he could.

But at last he began to hear shouts on the fleet as if some warning had been given. A hoarse voice right over his head by the rudder sweep answered.

"Lass gehen!"

And the fugitive heard a heavy rope hurled and strike the water.

"Good-night," murmured Jimmy, "me the other way now!"

So he slipped off quietly, dived without a sound and swam downstream until he felt his lungs were bursting. Then he stroked gently to the surface, rolled over and exhaled quietly as ever, and got a breath. Then he sank again, turned and dived on, to come up again and get his breath. His getaway was never noticed.

When he saw the dark bank looming up he swam close to it, grasped at some bushes and stopped. Then he lay resting. The barge fleet had been moored again. He saw a lantern moving, and another on the bank which showed a cluster of forms.

"Going to unload their stuff, and get back before daylight," thought Jimmy. "Thanks, Bill! You did me a favor. But I wish I had my bearings!"

For he knew now that the stream bore away parallel to the distant front line. The barge transport had come as far as it could. After making sure that no enemies were immediately about, Jimmy crept ashore and discovered what he expected—that a road followed the bend of the river. It wouldn't do to stick around here. And the curve of the river bed would take him

away from the front now. He hated to leave the shelter of the friendly trees. But off there he could see the white, unearthly flares rising slowly, and beyond the flashes of the guns.

"It ain't a raid," muttered Jimmy. "Too big —our fellows are slapping a barrage down behind their front lines for two miles or more! Business—big business! May be French or may be Yank—but if I keep going I'll have some Boches to deal with first."

Finally, thinking it over, he crossed the road. Twenty yards out in a field he tumbled into a shell crater. But Jimmy had done that forty times on his own side. So he crawled out, noted which direction the fire was heaviest and kept to the right of it. Certainly, any minute now, he ought to identify some German communication trench—it wasn't all going to be easy as this. In fact, Jimmy, down in his heart, didn't think he'd make it—just his eternal hopefulness and energy kept him trying with all his watchful eyes and clear head.

"Where are they?" he growled, lying flat on the wet earth. "That last shell over there showed something like sandbags; yes!—they are, and I

saw a pickle hat, too! That's communications all right!"

Watching over the rough clods he saw the heads of a file of men slowly going along the communication trench forty yards to his left. Keeping them in view, he crept on. A quarter of a mile of this and, by the burst of another shell, he discovered the parados of a battle trench stretching across his path. A group of men about a dugout were watching off to the right where the American barrage was heaviest. So Jimmy crept on about this. The whole plain ahead of the second German line was a welter of smoke, fog and shell flashes with the flares rising like dim white blankets beyond.

"Looks pretty bad," grunted Jimmy. "If I pass 'em I'm just going to get in our fire zone, and the boys are whooping it to-night."

But he had gone too far now to retreat. By day the Germans would find him without doubt. So he kept on and lay among the clods at last forty feet in the rear of the trench. Over his head went the mighty rush of the shells from the distant heights, and the American heavies hurled back their big ones to explode along the

creek and the hill slopes from which he had come. The night battle was on everywhere as far as he could see, and the ground trembled with the shock. Presently a trio of shells struck one after the other, almost in line along the German rear trench. Jimmy distinctly heard the Boches shout and call after this salvo. Then a shell swept down and hurled a jet of earth skywards not a hundred feet from him directly on the trench line. And Corporal May was on his feet instantly, and dashing squarely for this spot. Into the choking fumes and dusty smoke he sped, stumbled headlong into the wrecked trench, up among the disordered sandbags and thirty paces across before he flung himself flat on the ground.

He was past one German line at least!

After a moment he crept on. The American fire would grow more deadly every yard, but he had little fear of the Germans sniping him even if they saw him, for they would not dream of a Sammie out between their first and second lines. So Jimmy kept on crawling, crouching, off to his right but slowly forward. At last he made out some dim objects in the lurid smoke which proved to be the broken walls and roofs of an

entirely wrecked village. Cautiously he crawled to the nearest heap of bricks, expecting every moment to find the Boches. Coming to a stone wall that gave him an elevation of some fifteen feet, he crawled up to lie along this. Then he made out the German first line clearly—a hundred yards beyond the smoldering hamlet. But not a soul was among the ruins apparently.

"Too hot for 'em," muttered Jimmy. "Our fellows have been knocking these bricks every-which-way! And it'll be too warm for me, I guess!"

He could see the American lines now when a star bomb or a shell lit up No Man's Land, and seemed to part the smoke wreathes.

"Ain't two hundred yards!" muttered Jimmy, "but it might as well be two thousand miles! I'd be a goner in a minute out there—everybody on both sides would take a shot at me, even if I got through the Boche first trench—which I couldn't!"

A high-explosive shell curved down in the other end of the wrecked village which had consisted of not more than a dozen stone houses along a road, and the shock of it sent bits of

Jimmy's perch crumbling under him. And a hail of rocks and bricks struck all around.

He understood by this why the Germans preferred to hold their trenches on each side of the ruins rather than in them. He crawled down dubiously and along what had been the street. He stumbled over a machine-gun half buried in bricks, then the bodies of half a dozen of its defenders. Fifty feet away another wrecked machine-gun emplacement and more dead Boches half buried in the bricks. The Sammies had made this nest too hot to hold. Lying over a heap of rubbish Jimmy scanned the battle front. Something moved fifty yards out and directly in front. He made it out presently to be a low bank behind which figures crouched. There was a machine-gun crew, all right. A hundred feet to the left of it was another. Jimmy could just make out the crouched backs of the operators. There was another little group hidden away about some piece of machinery to the right.

And beyond there, when the lights showed right, he saw the German first line of defense. But the infantry were apparently doing little save lie snug up from the American fire.

"Wow!" muttered Jimmy when a sprinkle of shrapnel swept all about him from an exploding shell above. "If the fellows over there had the right range they'd wipe up the gunners. But they keep mauling these old ruins, and I'm 'It' for their observers."

He crawled back, lay along a low wall and rested. There was an attack coming sure as could be. The gunfire grew heavier until Jimmy could no longer see any of the German advanced line because of the smoke of exploding shells. He was jubilant at the fire of the American guns.

"The Boches'll have to get out of that," he thought, "and if they drop back here they'll be on me!"

So he began to hunt a hole. Under the wall ran a crevice from which he began digging the bricks and fragments. In half an hour he had a hiding place—provided his friends over there didn't knock it down on him, or even overthrow the whole wall with a heavy shell.

Then he crawled into his crack and dubiously thought it over. It was the wildest night Jimmy ever put in—and the idlest, too, as he worriedly thought. He was itching to be in the game some-

how. An hour more when it seemed the fire hurricane out there was at its height, Corporal May thought he detected a lightening of the sky.

Presently he saw the drifting smoke more plainly against the gray clouds of dawn. Then suddenly he started, scrambled to his feet and stared out to the front. The bombardment had swept down to almost nothing. And instantly there broke out a rattling snarl of German machine-guns and rifle fire all along the line.

"The Yanks are coming!" yelled Jimmy. "Yep—out there in the smoke!—Oh, say, if I could only see!"

It seemed as if, midst the uproar, he heard shouts and cries. Jumping up on his low wall, he saw now the four machine-gun nests in the middle ground; and then, through smoke wreathes beyond them, gray figures coming. Here and there by groups, some firing back, some staggering among the shell-holes, the Germans were retreating from the invisible front line.

And then, over his head, a new deluge of explosives burst—the American guns had raised the elevation and were drenching the back lines

and the communications. Jimmy saw the retreating Boches everywhere now. They streamed past the machine-gun emplacements steadily back and on, jumping down in the communication trenches, taking cover in shell-holes, but they did not come near the wrecked hamlet. The retreating streams diverged and disappeared in the inferno behind Jimmy's refuge seeking escape from the lifted barrage. Then his attention was taken by the nearer staccato of the four machine-gun crews out there pouring a deadly hail into his invisible but advancing comrades.

All along the front this new racket grew. The heavier smoke was lifting, the daylight breaking through the clouds, and Jimmy saw with a catch of his breath presently a line of dim charging figures over the German front line. The Sammies had it! Working parties were leaping in, but the first wave was sweeping on. Jimmy saw the bayonets gleam dully, the little squads that carried the Browning guns, the bombing parties here and there—all along the Americans were pressing the defeated Boches.

Regardless of the exploding shrapnel over

him, and the heavier shells that jarred the ruins all about him, Jimmy yelled and pounded his steel helmet. Why, they'd be on him now!—he only had to avoid being bombed or bayoneted by the charging groups to be free!

But as he watched the line he was conscious that the snarl of the machine-gunners ahead of him had become a roar. And out beyond them the American attack was faltering. Groups had disappeared, stumbled down in shell-holes or been wiped out by the machines. It was as if the rows of figures had been moving picture shapes and had been jerked off. Against the smoke as far as he could see the attackers had disappeared. However it was going further along the line, right before this wrecked village the German machine-gunners had broken the assault.

Jimmy was biting his fingers with fury. He could see it all and his comrades could not even tell from what points the invisible and annihilating fire was springing, so well the emplacements were camouflaged low in the earth. Yes, it was the old story—the attackers had carried the front line, but were held up beyond. They could not

mass enough men against this ruined hamlet to stand the machine-gun hail. It merely heightened the slaughter, and Jimmy knew the Yankee officers would not send their men into the open until this murderous point was smashed. By the growing light he could see beyond the captured line now. A steel helmet or two, or a group in some shell-hole. His elevation of ten feet on the wrecked wall gave him a glance at the Americans which the machine-gun men had not.

The American artillery might drench the ruined houses with shrapnel, but unless they discovered the emplacements out in front the infantry could not storm it. Jimmy knew by the lull that the Sammies had been held until the field guns behind had turned on the hidden machine-gunners. But time was priceless; perhaps the Sammies on either side had rushed the German second lines, but the enfilade from this point would spoil the whole assault.

"If they only knew!" muttered Jimmy. "Shorten their range fifty yards and they'd wipe out these fellows!"

He stared again above his wall. The machine-gun shelters were plainly visible from his rear

position. The German infantry were back in their second lines now deluged by the American barrage, but reorganizing to hold, for if the attackers succeeded here, the Boches would be driven across the river and the whole defensive zone clear to their heavy artillery line would be broken. They would have to get their big guns from the ridge or stand a chance of losing them in the next onrush of the victorious Sammies. Swiftly the possibilities unfolded to Corporal May's alert and military brain. A stroke now, just here, and the demoralized Germans would give way again. He knew why the four machine-gun crews had been left here to utter sacrifice. They had to cover the retreat or die.

"Have to pass it to 'em for courage," muttered Jimmy. "They got no chance if our field guns spot 'em!" Again he crept to his position on the crumbling wall. Little jets of earth spouted everywhere out on the flat where the artillery searched vainly for the machine-gun nests. But they might blindly maul this field for hours, and if one machine-gun was left it would check the charge. Jimmy saw with grudging admiration how skillfully the zone of fire

from the four points was arranged—it covered every possible advance of the Sammies for a thousand yards on each flank. And every minute counted now.

In the captured German first line he saw a figure move. A head, then an elbow move slowly. An officer-observer, Jimmy guessed, trying to spot the machine-guns. Once an airplane came humming out above the smoke clouds—and suddenly crumpled and fell. The shrapnel from the German batteries in the rear had got it. The affair made Corporal May wild with rage. The aviator might have discovered the machine-guns in another instant. But the gun nests seemed to have done the desperate deed they were sent to do—held the Americans to the front line until the Boches reorganized their shattered units.

Staring from his wall, as he lay flat among the broken brick and plaster, slowly an idea came to Corporal May that made him wince for a moment. He shut his eyes in thought, ground his teeth, then muttered:

"It's just for my gang out there—just for 'em, and the folks back home!"

CHAPTER XIV

CARRY ON!

AGAIN he watched intently the form of the hidden American observer. He knew that other field glasses were leveled from many points between the captured German sandbags seeking out the points of death. And he knew that scores of American sharpshooters watched not only the whole field but the ruins behind it for any sign of life.

Slowly crouching for the spring, taking his steel helmet in one hand and his handkerchief in the other, Jimmy leaped upright on the wall, stood a moment motionless, then thrust his right hand down and raised his left in the "preparatory" signal of the two-arm semaphore code. Slowly, deliberately he must move, now—not only the officer-observers but every Sammie sniper must see him—see him and also realize that it was not a German trick. They ought to know his uniform, Jimmy thought desper-

ately, even at the distance and dirty and ragged as he was.

Again he gave the "prepare" code signal, then slowly, hat in his left hand, handkerchief in right, in place of the signal flags that he had learned to use, Corporal Jimmy sent his silent message:

SHORTEN FIRE FIFTY DIRECT
BEFORE THIS POSITION.

It seemed to Jimmy as he finished the last motion that he stood in a great silence. The thunder of the barrage was high over him, and the machine-guns barked away spitefully out in front and far on the flanks the rifle fire broke in uneven little volleys. But just ahead it seemed that nothing happened. He heard the dull little plod of the shrapnel striking on earth and stone all about him, but he had heard these sounds all morning. Crouching behind his wall, he wiped the sweat from his eyes, and muttered:

"Maybe they didn't get it! Maybe——" He arose a bit and glanced back. There had come a crash of rifles somewhere—the sharpshooters in the German second lines had picked him up, had they?

"All right," growled Jimmy, "but your machine-guns ain't wise yet! No—and just for fear our gang ain't either, why, here goes!"

And again he crouched, sprang upright on the wall and started to repeat the two-arm signal. He had just swung his left arm over and under his right to form the letter O, when suddenly, as a black blanket dropped before his eyes, the earth twenty yards in front fountained up. He staggered a yard to one side, and then he felt the old wall reel beneath him. The end of it had gone out in a volley of loose stones. He turned to jump and his feet went out from under him as a terrific rush of air and gas hurled him off the spot. He struck on his face in crumbled bricks, his eardrums bursting with successive concussions—crash after crash on each side, out in front, and above.

"Oh, My-O!" gasped Corporal Jimmy, "they're burning the place up! They're rocking it full of 75's—they're blasting it to bedrock!"

He made a scramble for his hole, and reached it, to be buried in a shower of brick. The ruins shook under him and he felt a stinging, searing pain across his right shoulder and up his neck.

"Go to it," he whispered. "Blot 'em out—the rats!"

The last Corporal May remembered was trying to wipe the bricky dust from his eyes to stare up in a cloud that was brown twisting streaks shot through with hurtling objects. Then he gave up.

And when Jimmy began slowly to remember things he was conscious of a great quiet. The reverberations of big guns came, but they seemed far and like a peaceful summer storm. The infernal din that had been over and about him for twelve hours had all passed. He lay drawing in his breath slowly and then began to crowd and pick the plaster and brick from his body. Presently he could sit partly up.

He dug away weakly at the stuff on his legs, and noted that he had lain in a bloody little nest and must have been there hours. His right shoulder was stiff and swollen hugely so that he could hardly move his head. But he worked away with his left hand unearthing himself. A heavy cement fragment lay across his ankles and presently Jimmy despondently concluded that he couldn't lift it nor had he strength to crawl from

under it. So he sat back a moment to rest. The sun beat down hotly on his face and he wanted to find his helmet. But he couldn't twist his body far enough to see. What astonished him was to discover that his wall had vanished.

"Now, how did that happen?" mused Jimmy. "Must have gone out right over my head!"

He spoke aloud, and then he heard an astonished answer.

"Hi!" some one yelled, "the Fritzies did hold this place after all. Here's a fellow buried to his neck!"

Jimmy heard a crunch of feet, then he looked up to see a soldier with the Red Cross on his arm, staring down at him.

"A Sammie!" gasped the other. "How'd you get here?"

Some one else came running up. The two Red Cross men were digging Corporal May out; and the next moment carrying him over the brick heaps. Outside they laid him down. One began to slit his coat, and the other to whistle for some stretcher bearers who seemed idling away their time out on the field. It all seemed quiet—all cleaned up and nothing whatever doing.

When they washed his mouth out from the brick dust Jimmy began to demand things.

"Where's the outfit?"

"They're four miles over the Marne—they broke everything down here and went through. They got the third line and all the guns and stuff clear to the German main positions. Biggest thing yet, bucky, and you were out of luck to get this hunk of shell across your shoulder. And two shrapnel through your left leg, and——"

"Good-night!" murmured Jimmy. "Anything else?"

"How did you come to get buried by that wall? The Germans weren't shelling it—it was our artillery pounding the machine-guns to a pulp. You certainly didn't get away out ahead of our barrage all on your own?"

"Didn't I? Say, old saw-bones, I went half-way to Berlin, and then I just came back to hurry you guys up!"

"Hum," the ambulance corps man knelt to read the identification tag on Jimmy's neck. "Hi!" he said to the Red Cross man who was taking the data down on a card which would accompany the case of Corporal May for some time after.

"Hi! this fellow—his regiment is on the line six miles from here! How did he ever happen along?"

Jimmy rubbed his identification tag with his one good hand.

"Never mind. You fellows get me home. I'll explain to my bunch—that's all! *Ouch!*—it hurts! Everything hurts! But—we took the third line! Some party, Fritzie!—I know how it feels now, to be out where you got to yell: 'Them Yanks are comin'!' "

"What's eatin' on you, Bucky?" demanded the Red Cross man, "you ravin' out of your head?"

"Here's the little wagon just beyond that line," said the second man. "Get him up, there now!"

Corporal May stifled his agony as he was lifted and slid upon the stretcher. His steel helmet was laid upon his legs and the bearers lifted the burden and started slowly back across the torn and riven ground, down into the captured German trenches and then on. He couldn't see a thing except the blue sky, for he couldn't turn his head any longer.

When he was laid down again it was just behind a motor ambulance, and he could see the Red

Cross men conferring with a trio of officers. One was an Artillery captain and the other an Infantry captain and the third a major of the Signal Corps. Jimmy closed his eyes against the pain and waited for them to shove him into the ambulance. But he couldn't help hearing the argument.

"The way you laid your fire down there was a caution," the Infantry captain was saying. "I suppose that poor devil of a Boche deserter who wigwagged the machine-gun location to us, never had a chance."

"How?" demanded the Signal Corps major suddenly, "would any Boche common soldier have our semaphore code down so pat? Lieutenant Leroy spotted this fellow first on the wall—and he swears that it wasn't any German deserter. It was an American, sure, he says."

Jimmy lay with closed eyes. He felt rather than saw a doctor bustle up to the ambulance, give him one sharp professional glance, and ask the Red Cross worker something.

"We picked him up out in those bricks, sir. No, he didn't have any arms, nor kit—he says,

sir, that it was our own guns that slammed him —shrapnel and field guns."

Jimmy heard a mutter of surprise. A shuffle around his cot, and he opened his eyes to discover four officers of four different branches of the United States Army staring down at him.

"Impossible!" gasped the Infantry captain. "I was on observation for the first wave that went through, and none of our men could have got out there behind those machine-guns! Unless——"

He bent lower and looked at Jimmy's blood-soaked khaki blouse. From it he took a dirty card—the registration card which the German military prisoner guard had issued to him. "By Jove!" muttered the captain. "This corporal was there—on his way back!"

"Was it you, sir?" demanded the Signal Corps major gruffly; "because if it was you did something—you broke the way for the biggest mash we gave 'em yet, sir!" He lifted Jimmy's hand gently. "You'll get the *Croix de Guerre* for this, if it's true!"

"Yes, sir. But I got one already, sir. That's why I had to put this over, I think. Just that.

But when do you think I'll get out of the hospital, sir?"

"I give you," put in the Army surgeon who had been feeling over Corporal May's shoulder, "seven weeks—and a rest for a bit. You probably can be sent home, if you want—on a rest; if you're the chap who put our whole division through the line of the Marne!"

"I'd rather stay, sir," murmured Jimmy. "Until it's over—over here. Then I'll enjoy it better—over there."

THE END

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